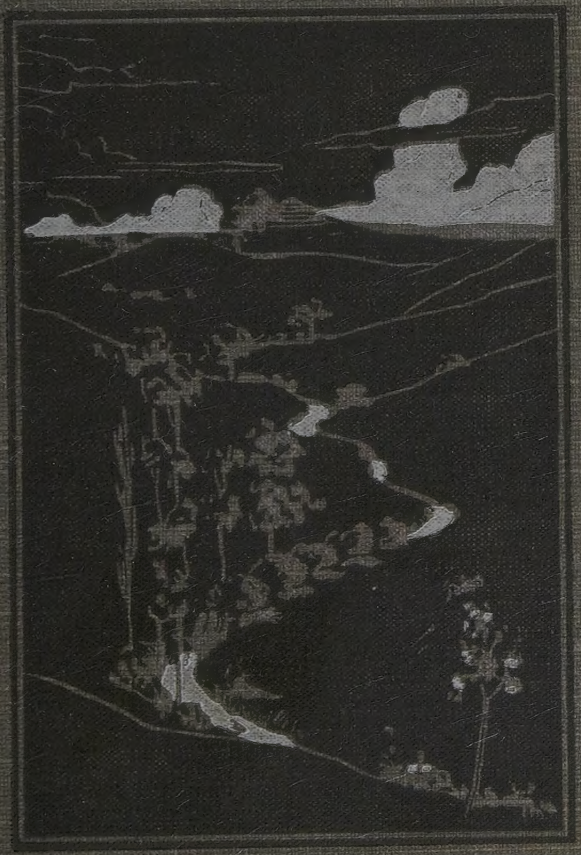
The Arcadians



H. C. Minchin.

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THE ARCADIANS

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BY

H. C. MINCHIN

'Amant alterna Camenae'

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TO

A. M.

THIRTEEN of the ensuing chapters were printed in the *Oxford Magazine*, the episode of 'The Yellow Wagon' in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the verses in 'A Question of Authorship' in the *Speaker*. The several editors are thanked for their courteous permission to reprint. In its completed form the book now makes its first appearance.

The writer desires also to express his thanks to Mr. B. H. Blackwell for assistance with the proof-sheets.

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THE ARCADIANS.

I.

EXPECTING A LETTER:

WITH SOME REMARKS ON HYACINTHS.

'Why any one should get up soon after sunrise these dismal mornings,' said my Aunt Penelope, 'apparently with the sole object of leaning over the garden-gate and looking down the road, is more than I can understand.'

'But the hyacinths, aunt,' I began.

'Well,' she interrupted, 'if the wind *has* broken off some more of them in the night, does it do them any good for you to go and shake your head over them at such an hour?'

I did not argue the matter. Argument is my abhorrence, discussion my delight: but my aunt Penelope cannot grasp the distinction.

All the same, I did look at the hyacinths before I went to my post of observation—just for a moment, for conscience sake. But that fact didn't seem to salve my conscience (which has been abnormally active since I had the influenza), so I made a full confession to Candida—who is a friend of mine.

'It was a fib indirect,' I said ruefully, 'I did look at them—but why I really got up was to meet the postman.'

'As if I didn't know that!' said Candida. 'And as if your aunt didn't know too! I call it downright equivocation.'

I have sometimes thought that Candida has an imperfect appreciation of the lights and shades of fiction. But I did not say so. To cover my retreat, I began to dilate on the place filled in our civilization by the rural postman, and was growing quite eloquent, when I was suddenly dashed by the recollection that Cowper had dealt exhaustively with the theme. '*Pereant*,' I wound up, abruptly, '*qui ante nos nostra dixerunt!*'

'If you're going to talk Latin,' said Candida, 'I shall go away. As to the postman, you overrate him ridiculously. Now, if *I* see him any morning and he doesn't bring me a letter I particularly expected—why, I feel as if I didn't want to see him for another week at least.'

'But consider what we owe to him,' I went on, 'light, warmth, instruction! Doesn't he bring last night's paper?'

'Not to *us*,' said Candida, simply, 'our paper is brought by the carrier: and it's a morning one. Besides, you know quite well that the only news *you* desire from the outside world is news about your Book!'

'As a partial exposition of the truth,' I hazarded, 'I would venture to bracket that statement with my own remark about the hyacinths!'

Candida ignored the parallel. 'At any rate,' said she, 'it's true enough for all practical purposes. Otherwise, why not tell your aunt that it's thirst for the latest news that gets you up so early?'

'Because I scarcely think she would believe me,' said I. 'And you know I never talk to her about the Book. She thinks that, as a subject, *Problems of the Next Century But One* is deficient in actuality, and that no publisher will look at it. That was why I fell back upon the hyacinths.'

'Oh, I hope not,' said Candida, 'for I want to see them.'

'You shall,' said I.

'By the way,' said Candida, as we walked along, 'isn't your early rising rather a puzzle to the postman too?'

'He's getting used to it,' said I. 'He said to me quite sympathetically this morning, 'There's only the paper, Sir!' I had been reading Boswell over-night, and on the impulse of the moment I told him he was "a barren rascal."'

'Oh dear!' said Candida, 'what *did* he say?'

'He looked at me very straight, and asked me, begging my pardon, what he had done that I should call him names? I hastened to explain

that the words were used by Dr. Johnson of Henry Fielding, and that in their present application they merely expressed my playful irritation with him, the postman, for bringing me never a letter. He gave the reins a shake, and the pony went on up the hill: but I heard him grumbling to himself that *he* wasn't going to stand being spoken to like that, if Fielding was: and as for that Johnson, he'd never heard of a doctor of that name in these parts.'

'So you see,' said Candida, 'the net result of your early rising is that you earn the ill-will of the postman and your own disappointment.'

'Pardon me,' said I, 'you forget the newspaper. As for being disappointed, perhaps I am, though of course it is too much to suppose the disappointment affects you at all!'

'Now, don't be cross,' said Candida, 'or I shall turn round and go straight home! Isn't it enough that I've promised to read your old problems by and by?'

I am easily mollified, and we pursued our way in peace. Presently we reached my garden gate, a moment later the hyacinth bed. Purple and white, pink and yellow, the flowers shook their bells in the wind. It was a pretty sight. Candida clapped her hands.

'How lovely!' she exclaimed. '"Thy hyacinth hair"—I think I understand that now.'

I glanced under the brim of Candida's sailor hat.

'I understood it long ago,' said I.

'Yes?' said she. 'But then you make a study of problems, you know!'

I stooped down and recklessly broke off two of the finest and darkest plants, and offered them for Candida's acceptance.

'Oh—h!' exclaimed she, in dismay, 'whatever will your aunt Penelope say?'

'I don't know what she'll say,' I answered desperately, 'but I know what I shall have to say—that there was a very high wind last night!'

'There,' said Candida. 'One fib leads to another, you see!' But she stuck the blooms in her waistband, all the same.

That was yesterday. And here I am again. Waiting for the postman? Well, as a partial exposition of the truth—but I have made that remark before.

II.

FURTHER PROBLEMS:

MY ANTIPATHY TO SPILSBY—CANDIDA'S NEW HAT.

ENGROSSED in the problems of an unborn century, I am apt to be indifferent to those of our own day. At times, however, they force themselves upon me.

For instance: there was a football match in our village the other day—our eleven against a team from Oxford. It was the last match of the season. As a member of the club—a non-playing member—I went to look on. I like to support local institutions. Besides, I used to play myself once. I couldn't really spare the time, but relaxation is a duty, isn't it?

As it happened, Candida was there too. She likes watching football, so there's nothing strange in that, either. Of course there were other people there, too: and of course I didn't mind their being there—why should I? But I do think it's rather hard I can't go anywhere without seeing that young ass, Spilsby.

Now, here comes my first problem—why do I find Spilsby so offensive?

Spilsby is learning to be a land-surveyor, or agent, or something of that sort, with a man near here who *has* learnt. When he knows his lesson, I suppose he'll quit these scenes, and go and survey elsewhere. But I'm afraid he learns slowly. At present his chief occupation seems to be surveying *us*, over a particularly high collar, through an eyeglass. He's quite a normal young man: very upright, very red, very healthy, with rather a loud voice and rather a fatuous laugh. Some people think him good-looking. As a rule I like normal people, but . . . . perhaps it's the eyeglass. Yes, I think it must be. It's hard to look otherwise than patronizing through an eyeglass—too hard for him, anyhow. And nobody likes to be patronized.

Well—when I came on the ground, there was Spilsby, making himself agreeable, in his florid way, to Candida and one or two more people. How easily women are amused! I could see nothing to laugh at. But perhaps that was because I was confronted by problem number two.

Spilsby I can stand—under protest. But what had I done that Candida should treat me so distantly?

Spilsby rattled on inanely. I was tongue-tied. I was thinking of clearing off, when Candida remarked, 'You don't seem to have much to say this afternoon.'

'Mr. Spilsby's monologue doesn't leave much room,' I began—

But Candida struck in, 'He's full of information, but I don't believe half of it: and I want you to tell me what the different colours are that the other side are wearing.'

Her manner was less distant, and I plucked up heart.

'That,' said I, 'is an old Carthusian. The black and white is Magdalen. The man in goal has a Perambulator cap on.'

'Goodness!' said Candida, 'who are the Perambulators?'

'They are the fellows,' said I, 'who are just out of—'

'The Nursery?' put in Spilsby, and laughed noisily.

'No,' said I, 'just out of the Eleven, as I was about to explain to Miss Ferrars.'

Spilsby went on laughing. Candida laughed too. But I didn't. Why can't I laugh at Spilsby's jokes?

Perhaps Candida thought I might have done so. Anyhow, she froze again. After another attempt at conversation, which fell quite flat, I went off home.

My aunt Penelope expressed surprise at my being back so early.

'There was too much frost in the air for me,' said I: and then I told her of Candida's attitude.

She pondered for a moment. Then she said, 'Was there anything else about her that was different?'

'Nothing.'

'Nothing in her dress?'

'Nothing—stay, though, she had a new hat on, and very well she looked in it.'

'Did it occur to you to tell her so?'

'I'm afraid not,' said I.

'My dear good boy,' said my aunt Penelope, 'the mere fact that she is wearing a new hat is quite enough to account for any girl being distant.'

'You don't say so!' I gasped. 'In the name of foolishness—why?'

'If you weren't a man,' said my aunt, 'you'd understand. As you are, I suppose you can't, and it's useless my trying to explain.'

However—Candida doesn't have a new hat every day, luckily. I asked my friend the poet, a while ago, if he could explain her popularity—which is extensive.

'She's such a way with her,' said he.

'What way?' I said.

'Wait,' said he, 'and I'll try and tell you.'

And this is his account of

CANDIDA'S WAY.

A dull grey sky and a grey dull earth,
Never a glint on the ruffled mere:

The north wind tosses in cruel mirth
  The few withered leaves of yester year:
But earth heeds not, call he never so loud,
Asleep, or dead, say? wrapped in her shroud.

Be it sleep, be it death, at a charm it flies.
  Waters are gold in the sunbeam's ray:
Primrose, violet, ope their eyes,
  There's a dash of green in the copse's grey,
And a million of tiny leaves uncurled:
Spring has loosened the chains o' the world.

Sorrowful heart, are you grown less sore?
  Eyes, have you ceased to weep for a while?
Flower of joy, do you bloom once more?
  Lips, you recall you were wont to smile?
A miracle! who was the worker? say!
Oh, the way of Spring is Candida's way.

You see, he admires Candida a good deal—but then he admires a lot of other girls just as much. That's a catholicity I thoroughly approve.

I wish that idiotic Spilsby had more of it, though.

III.

A WHIRLWIND IN PETTICOATS:

AND WHAT CANDIDA THOUGHT OF IT.

'The Priory is let at last, Brian,' said my Aunt, looking up from a letter.

'Really?' said I, emerging from the newspaper, which may have coloured my reply. 'To the King of Siam, or Mr. Chamberlain?'

'Oh, well,' said my aunt, 'if it doesn't interest you——'

'But it does,' said I; 'I don't want to be behind the times.' And I put the paper down.

'You'd never guess who have taken it,' said she. 'My old friends, the Blakes. Fanny Blake and I were at school together, and I stood godmother to Augusta, her daughter. It's ten years since I saw Augusta. Such a dear little thing she was —so shy, so demure!'

'Ah,' said I, 'she'll be a nice friend for Candida.'

My aunt looked the least bit doubtful.

'Oh! they change a good deal in ten years,' said I cheerfully.

'I'm never quite sure whether you're serious, Brian,' my aunt began.

'There's not a County Councillor more so.'

'But what I was going to say is that dear Fanny writes that Augusta is dying to see the place, and could we have her here for a few days? The Priory won't be ready just yet.'

I muttered something about 'interruptions' and 'press of work.'

'She's coming to see the place—and to visit me,' said my aunt, 'not you. You shan't be disturbed.'

My perversity was roused at once. 'Let her come,' I said. 'She shall see the place: and she shall see me.'

'You talk as if you were a show,' said my aunt. 'At any rate it's settled, isn't it?'

'I never questioned that,' said I.

Next week our guest arrived. She brought a bicycle, a violin, and a set of golf-clubs—a fair provision, I thought, for a few days' visit—also regrets for the absence of her two terriers, 'who would so enjoy a run in the country—the darlings! But never mind,' she added, 'I'll bring them next time. Now—say I may, Aunt Penelope!' Here she gave my aunt a hug.

'Shy?' thought I.

'I don't think——' hesitated my aunt.

'I am open to persuasion, Miss Blake,' said I.

'Be quiet, Brian,' said my aunt.

Augusta blushed, and said laughingly, 'I can defend myself, I assure you!'

'There will be no occasion, Augusta,' said my aunt with some severity; but she got no farther.

'I'm not Augusta—please. I can't live up to the name. I'm Gusty;' and she swept us a tempestuous curtsey. My aunt's serious look became a smile. The laughter in Gusty's blue eyes is infectious. They went off together—Gusty's arm round my aunt's waist.

'Decidedly,' said I, 'they change a good deal in ten years!'

'Who do?' was Gusty's parting shot. 'I shall make you tell me after dinner!'

I believe I did tell her that: and probably a good deal more. But my impressions of Gusty Blake's visit are a trifle confused. As to doing any work—well, what with the bicycle and the golf-clubs in the day time, and the violin in the evenings, I hadn't much leisure. There were accompaniments to be practised, tyres to be mended. I was thoroughly disorganized. But from a welter of interludes that of the skirt-dancing emerges.

My aunt insists that it was all my fault. Well, you shall judge for yourselves.

We had asked a few people to dinner to meet Gusty—the vicar and his wife, and his brother-in-law, the poet, and Candida.

It was quite a pleasant little dinner. The poet took Gusty in, and she was a model of demureness. But I didn't feel quite easy, all the same. She is a perpetual surprise. I had made that discovery. And it was in the drawing-room, afterwards, that it happened.

By ill-luck the poet got on the topic of modern dancing, comparing it, to its disadvantage, with old-world measures. He found fault with the monotony of waltzing, and talked scornfully of teetotums.

I saw Gusty's eyes glisten.

She got up and by a sudden movement gave a twirl to her skirts.

'Dancing needn't be monotonous,' said she; 'and if Mr. Gough'—glancing at me and ignoring my frown—'will play for me——'

What could I do? Before I could raise any objection, the poet had declared that it would be delightful. I was conscious that the vicar's wife—an excellent woman—was looking at Gusty's skirt with curiosity. I felt I was in for it.

'Here's the music, Mr. Gough!'

I sat down to the piano with mingled feelings.

First of all she danced a Spanish dance—a *cachucha*, I think—and it was really very pretty. I believe every one liked it. But then, I suppose, the music got into her feet, and before I realized what had happened she had glided, and I with her,

into a regular skirt-dance. Let me hazard a negative description: it was not monotonous, it was not slow, it was not even tame. Such a dance is familiar enough, but the vicar's wife had never seen it. We are slaves to custom.

I own I was quite carried away. I think the poet was, too: I am certain the brother-in-law was. But at the height of my enthusiasm I caught the eye of the vicar's wife.

After that I daren't look at my aunt or the vicar. At last it was over.

'What next?' I said. I was by this time reckless.

'A hornpipe!' said Gusty: and from a skirt-dancer she was changed into a sailor-boy. I really don't know what she did with the skirt. At length it ended and she flung herself into a chair.

'Some lemonade, please!' said she.

Well, the next thing I knew, the vicar's wife was saying coldly, 'I think it is time *for us* to be going.' The vicar coughed and assented. The brother-in-law dissembled his smiles. And the party broke up rather hurriedly.

The moon was at the full, and Candida had elected to walk home, I escorting her.

Defiant of clerical disapproval, and sure of Candida's sympathy, I was beginning to launch out in praise of Gusty's grace and skill, when Candida remarked, 'It may be very well in its proper place.'

'Meaning——?' I said.

'I mean, I don't think it was in place in your aunt's drawing-room, especially considering the company.'

'Oh, the poet,' I began—

'I wasn't referring to him. The vicar's wife was pained by it. And I must say I think it would have been kinder of you to prevent it.'

'How could I?'

'Surely you could have made difficulties about the music. It was new to you.'

'It wasn't quite new,' I said. 'You see, I had practised it.'

'What?' said Candida.

'I couldn't help it, really. You know how wet it was yesterday. My aunt had to go to some meeting. Gusty made me practise the music. I had to amuse her, you see.'

'And she danced then also?'

'Just a little,' I pleaded.

'A rehearsal, in fact,' said Candida.

'No, no,' I said. 'I never foresaw this. And after all—*honi soit*. The vicar's wife has no right to be shocked, and no reason either.'

'That may be,' said Candida; 'but she was your guest, and as such——'

'Oh, I know,' said I; 'and I'm very sorry it happened. And I wouldn't have you do it.' I went on, 'It's well enough for a mere mortal,

but I dont want to see a goddess in an accordion-pleated shirt!'

But Candida only gave the slightest little forward jerk of her right shoulder. I know what that means. And yet most girls would have taken it as a compliment—now, wouldn't they?

When I got home my aunt Penelope began, 'Brian—'

But I raised my hand in deprecation. 'Spare me, Aunt Penelope! I've had one innings, and I don't want another. I admit it's all my fault, if that's any good. Only, I won't have Gusty scolded: she's such a dear little thing, you see—so shy, so demure.'

'You are too provoking,' said my Aunt Penelope.

IV.

JUPITER AND HIS SATELLITES.

'Dear Brian,' wrote the poet, 'I see there are some interesting occurrences in Jupiter's system this evening. His first satellite re-appears from eclipse at 8.30 p.m., at which time the shadow of the second satellite will also be upon the planet. At 10.15 the second satellite will be seen passing away from the planet after transit, and at 10.45 the third satellite will disappear behind Jupiter. It is not often one gets events with three different satellites at convenient hours on one evening. Will you come round and observe these manœuvres, if you have nothing better to do?'

It was a day or two after our unfortunate dinner-party. The world—my little world—did not seem to smile upon me. I was feeling out of sorts and out of humour. The poet's invitation came as a welcome diversion. It would at least be cheering, I reflected, to see something come out from eclipse, even if it was only one of Jupiter's moons!

Besides, the poet has a considerable knowledge of astronomy and a very superior telescope. I accepted at once. I looked forward to a quiet and interesting evening, untroubled by feminine alarums and excursions.

So I presented myself at the poet's door a few minutes before half-past eight, in order not to miss any part of the programme. But how about the quiet evening? I don't associate a quiet evening with Spilsby, and Spilsby was already on the scene. Well! I suppose he amuses Garth by force of contrast. Certainly, no two people were ever more unlike. Old Mr. Ferrars was there, also—Candida's uncle. It takes a lot to get him away from home in an evening. And there was Candida, too. Now I think of it, Mr. Ferrars is very keen about astronomy, but I didn't know Spilsby was.

I couldn't help wishing there hadn't been a party, but, of course, I didn't let that appear. It was a little hard to dissemble, though, when Spilsby led off with some idiotic remark about satellites and praiseworthy punctuality. However, nobody paid any attention to him, so I felt I could afford to overlook his attempt at wit. I made a mental note of it, but all I said was, 'I didn't know you took an interest in the stars!'

'I don't know that I have done, hitherto,' he said, 'but Miss Ferrars has taken me in hand, and

when I heard of this excitement in Jupiter's system, I asked if I mightn't come and have a look through the spy-glass.'

At this moment the poet called us.

'Here's the first satellite,' he exclaimed. 'Come and look, all of you!'

We looked, one after another. The satellite had emerged from shadow, and shone in the empyrean—a new birth, one might have supposed, in the hosts of heaven.

'And how many satellites has Jupiter?' Candida asked.

'Four,' said the poet. 'Four satellites, or moons; he's better off than our planet, you see.'

'The people on Jupiter must be pretty well moonstruck,' Spilsby remarked. 'Just think of the vividness of the moonlight, with four moons shining all at once! They must want moonshades in Jupiter, I should think!'

'But Mr. Garth,' said Candida, 'are there people in Jupiter?'

'Impossible to say,' he answered 'there may be.'

'And they may be looking at the satellite now, just as we are! Only, they don't need a telescope, do they?'

'No: the satellite looks to them very much as our moon looks to us. And Jupiter's moons, like our own, always shew the same face to their planet. Strange, isn't it, that in spite of this the

moon should have been chosen as the type of inconstancy?'

'Juliet shared the common error,' I ventured to remark, 'when she forbade her lover to swear by "the inconstant moon"!'

'Yes,' said Candida, 'but she was thinking of its waning, I suppose.'

'No doubt,' said the poet. 'And when Omar wrote "Ah moon of my delight, that know'st no wane," he was less true to nature than Shakespeare. But then, of course, he spoke in terms of hyperbole.'

'Poets usually do.' It was the voice of Mr. Ferrars.

'Yes—in their poetry,' said Garth, 'but in real life they are literal enough, I fancy. The moon has been overworked in poetry, though, it seems to me.

> You common people of the skies,
> What are you when the moon shall rise?

Unless a poet can beat that, he had better give the moon a rest.'

'But think of the temptation in Jupiter,' Candida said. 'How impossible to let the moon alone, when there are four of her!'

'True, but perhaps there are no poets in that planet.'

'Or if there are,' said Mr. Ferrars, in his precise tones, 'perhaps it's a penal offence to introduce

the word satellite into poetry, as Pope had the temerity to do. You remember—

> Or ask of yonder argent fields above
> Why Jove's satellites are less than Jove!'

'Well,' said Candida, 'the poets in Jupiter—and we must at least hope there are some, Mr. Garth—can't be stopped *looking* at her, at them, I mean. And I'm sure they like doing that, if they're nice people; nice people always have liked looking at the moon, you know, from Endymion onwards.'

'Don't know him,' Spilsby said. 'Was he nice?'

'One has always understood so.'

'And what made him stare at the moon?'

'Because he thought *she* was nice, I suppose.'

'A dangerous habit, though,' said Mr. Ferrars, 'as Endymion found.'

'How was that, sir?' Spilsby asked. 'Did he go blind?'

'Blind? No. What should make you think that?'

'Oh, because once when I was at sea, coming from Bordeaux, it was—I fell asleep on deck in the moonlight—full moon shining right in my eyes, and a sailor johnny came and woke me up. Said it was dangerous, that he'd known men do it and be blind for days. But that wasn't what happened to What's-his-name?'

'No,' said the old gentleman. 'He fell asleep

and never woke again. It's impossible to be too careful, Mr. Spilsby, where moonlight is concerned.'

As some time had to elapse before any further occurrences in the sphere of Jupiter, at the suggestion of our host, who knew Mr. Ferrars' fondness for the game, we sat down to a rubber of whist. We cut for partners, with the result that Candida and I found ourselves opposed to Mr. Ferrars and Spilsby. It is an unfortunate thing when a very good player and a singularly bad one are yoked in unequal fellowship, unless the good player is extremely charitable, and good players are not always that. Whether Spilsby was thinking of the sad fate of What's-his-name, or of his own escape on board the steamer, I am unable to say. The fact remains that he committed one after another most of those errors which put a partner's forbearance to the test. He ignored calls for trumps, he trumped Mr. Ferrars' best card, finally he revoked. Old Mr. Ferrars has a gift of sarcasm, and, I fear, a pleasure in the exercise of it. Spilsby took it very well, but after his revoke (which gave us the game) he said he thought he'd had enough whist for one evening, and that he dared say Mr. Ferrars had, too; and soon afterwards he said good-night and left.

Mr. Ferrars joined the poet at the telescope.

'What was that Mr. Spilsby said when you

came in to-night?' said Candida. 'Something about satellites and punctuality?'

For answer I took the poet's letter from one pocket and my watch from another. It was 10.15. We heard the hall-door close behind the withdrawing Spilsby.

'Let me read you an extract,' I said. '"At 10.15 the second satellite will be seen passing away from the planet." It is now exactly 10.15. I conclude that Mr. Spilsby must have been making some reference to his own exactness.'

'But the first satellite?' Candida enquired.

'Come along, you two,' cried the poet, before I had time to answer her. 'You must make haste if you want to see the second satellite passing away.'

V.

CANDIDA'S STORY:

THE WHITE BABY.

'THEN I am forgiven?' said I.

'There was nothing to forgive,' said Candida: and for a moment her hand lay in mine.

'Then why——?' I began: but she stopped me.

'You are not to want to know everything.'

'At least, then,' said I, 'give me some assurance that I'm restored to favour.'

'Very well, I will. Shall I tell you about the White Baby?'

'Please do,' said I: for I had long been promised the story.

'It was last autumn,' she began, 'when we were at the sea. It wasn't a horrid full-dress watering-place, but just a kind of lotos land, where one can do as one pleases, and be natural. It's quite a paradise for children. Firm, hard sand—the kind you can build with. Miles of it, too, so there's lots of room. I don't think I ever saw so many children together—at any rate, I never saw so

many happy ones. There were no tantrums, I assure you. The bigger ones built castles and paddled, the little ones sat and played tunes on the shingle with their spades, and crooned at the sea. There was one thing of about five, in bare legs and a knickerbocker suit, who persisted in claiming me for his aunt, and made me play with him the whole of one afternoon. But it isn't about him I'm going to tell you, but about the White Baby.

'We called him so because everything about him was white: his clothes were white, his mailcart was white, and his nurse was dressed in white from head to foot. Some fancy of his mother's, I suppose. And his face——' Candida paused.

'Pink and white?' I suggested.

'Sometimes: but more often pale—too pale. Perhaps it was that that drew me to him. Perhaps because he seemed to claim relationship with me through my own foolish name. I don't know. But at any rate he did attract me. I got acquainted with his nurse—there was never any one else with him—and heard all about him from her. It seemed that the father was in India when the White Baby was born: and then he got badly wounded in a skirmish on the frontier. The mother went out to nurse him, leaving her baby with its grandparents—who were old and couldn't get about much. Now the father was well again,

and they were expected home very soon—in a few weeks, in fact.

'You may tell me that baby knew nothing about it—that he must have forgotten his mother. But I know better. How? Because he told me he hadn't.'

'Oh—he could talk then?'

'No. That is, not exactly: not as we do. He wasn't old enough for that. But I could understand him, all the same. There are ways. Why should he have stared and stared out to sea, as he did, if he wasn't watching for their ship? He told me he was, as plainly as if he had said it in as many words. I got into the habit of walking beside the white mailcart every morning. He told me heaps more, too—not all at once, but gradually—how he wanted his mother back again, and how curious he was to see his father. The poet often joined us—he was staying there too. And he used to philosophize over the White Baby—you can imagine how. He wanted me to believe that that child remembered all sorts of things—that he remembered more things than ever I had forgotten. The idea! But poets are so fanciful, aren't they?'

'Yes—poets of both sexes.'

'What does that mean? But never mind. Well, I got deeper than ever in the White Baby's confidence. He hadn't a secret from me. But one

thing troubled me. Though he was very happy, he got paler and paler—till at last he made me think of nothing so much as of a white rose. And one day the mailcart didn't appear as usual. I went to inquire. He was ill—very ill. He had got a chill—no one could say how, for there had been no want of care—and he hadn't the strength to throw it off . . . . Well, in a few days it was all over.

'And the very day he died his father and mother came back.

'Of course I had no business to do it. I know that. But I couldn't help it. I wrote to his mother to tell her I had loved her baby for her while she was away: and how he had seemed to speak of her. And then I got the saddest little note, asking me to come and see her. And I went. Well . . . . We are friends since then, she and I, and I think we always shall be.

'He was buried in the churchyard on the cliff: but there are pine-trees to shelter him from the wind. And there—for they made me come—his mother and father, the nurse and I, said good-bye to the White Baby.

'I was dreadfully sorry about it. Indeed I could never bring myself to speak of it, until now. The poet was sorry too—sorry for the White Baby, and sorry that I was sorry. You know how kind he is. And you know his way of showing

sympathy. He didn't say much, but he wrote me some verses about it. I meant to read them to you. I should like your opinion of them. But I think I'd sooner you read them yourself. Here they are.'

And this is what I read:

Flowers many, of many a hue,
  Nodded and danced on the windy height:
But none of them bore a message for you,
  You looked for purity's emblem—white.
'Be they of white, if you gather me posies,
For the dear white sake of lilies and roses.'

Oh, but the bud you found was rare,
  Pale as a snowdrop set in the snow!
To watch and tend it was all your care,
  That the fair white blossom at last should blow.
'The hearts of the gayer flowers are sleeping:
This one gives his heart to my keeping.'

A Shadow passed—and the bud is gone,
  Gathered and gone. You are lonely now,
Your heart is sad, and your eyes are wan:
  Let the tears for healing fall.—But thou,
Rapt from the storm, in the lee of the shower,
Sleep for a while, O little flower!

'Well,' said Candida, 'what do you think of them?'

But somehow I didn't feel in the mood for criticism just then. So I gave the lines back to Candida—without a word.

VI.

'AMONG MY BOOKS.'

I have been a good deal exercised lately as to whether it is better to work with one's back to the window or facing it. In the latter position one may derive inspiration from the world outside; but then, one's attention may be distracted. On the whole, I am inclined to think it depends upon the state of the weather. If one is to work facing the window, the day must not be too attractive. Of course, a great deal depends, too, upon the prospect from your window. Now, mine commands a rather charming view—lawn and trees in the foreground, then the river, then a background of hills. Nothing inharmonious, you see; no chimney-stacks. So the other morning, having a good deal to do, I sat down to work with my face to the window.

I got on well for a while. An occasional glance at the view refreshed me. Nature was prodigal of imagery. 'As in the natural world,' I wrote, 'so in the moral'—in short, my pen was very busy.

Presently I put it down for a moment's rest, and became aware of two figures seated on a bench in the foreground. They were my aunt Penelope and my nephew, Jack Hutchinson, who is spending the last week of the Easter holidays with us.

Now, my aunt and nephew are totally foreign to the theme I was engaged upon, so that I am wholly unable to explain why I permitted their presence, still less vain speculation as to what their topic of conversation might be, to clash with my train of thought. They were talking with some animation, and Jack was enforcing his remarks by hammering on the grass with the end of a hockey-stick.

I repeat, the subject of their conversation could not conceivably have any bearing upon my thesis. Yet the fact remains that my argument faded into insignificance before an unreasoning but peremptory desire to know what they were talking about. It would have been perfectly easy for me to step outside and ascertain for myself, but I had no mind to do that. I must needs set myself to solve the riddle by observing their gestures. I am not inquisitive. It was merely that this idiotic puzzle forced itself upon me. I *had* to devote myself to its solution. I commend to psychologists the fatuity of such a state of mind.

Half an hour passed. I was still staring out of the window. My energies were rapidly exhaust-

ing themselves. Suddenly I bethought me of an escape from the predicament. I rose abruptly, took my chair with me, set it down with an angry thud on the other side of the table, and in five minutes was absorbed in writing once more.

I may have been thus occupied for another half hour, when I seemed to hear a whisper at my ear.

'They've stopped talking, why have they stopped talking?'

The whisper was so real to me, that I answered aloud, quite angrily, 'I don't know, and I don't care. Don't interrupt!' Then, of course, I laughed at myself. But it was no good. The foolish question kept recurring to me, like the refrain of a song one can't forget, until at last, wearied by its iteration, I got up and went to the window to see if I could find an answer.

The occupants of the bench were still two, but Jack was no longer one of them. My aunt was still there, and with her another lady, whose identity was concealed by a white sunshade.

I looked down at my desk. After all, I had covered a good deal of paper—a fair morning's work. Then I looked out of the window. There was a chequered shade upon the lawn, for the leaves were but partially unfolded. A gentle breeze stirred them. It would be pleasant out of doors, I reflected. There hadn't been a morning yet when one could sit out with much satis-

faction. Also, I seemed to recognise the white sunshade.

Has it ever struck you how some people resemble certain flowers? If not, do look at the first pansy you see; its grim expression of countenance will surely recall to you someone of your acquaintance. But it wasn't of a pansy I thought, as I crossed the lawn, and the owner of the sunshade turned to greet me, but of some tall lily, all white but for its petals of gold. For her dress was white, her hat was trimmed with something white and fleecy, and there was a broad band of old gold ribbon about her throat.

'Have you come to tell us that summer is here?' I said.

'Not on purpose for that,' said Candida—for it was she—'and I can't truthfully say it is. But it's like summer, isn't it?'

'You—I mean it is, very,' I said. 'I was in the study, and I had a sudden conviction that summer had come. And so I came out to see if I was right.'

'Aunt Penelope!' It was Jack's voice. He came running across the lawn. 'How do you do, Miss Ferrars? Oh, aunt Penelope, do come and look, I've found a nest full of young birds, and I want you to tell me if they aren't redstarts; I believe they are!' All this in a breath. My aunt, who can refuse Jack nothing, and who is a

bit of an ornithologist, got up and went away with him. I took the seat she had vacated, and glanced at Candida. Yes, a lily was the flower, certainly.

'And what were you doing this fine morning?' Candida asked.

'I was among my books,' I answered.

'It's almost too fine for that, isn't it?' said she.

'Almost—at least, it is now.'

'Still, it's better to be employed like that, than—oh, just look at that butterfly! It's the first I've seen.'

'You will see many more—please finish the sentence.'

'I've forgotten how it began.'

'"It is better,"' I quoted mercilessly, '"to be employed like that, than—"'

'I've forgotten how I meant to end it!'

'Shall I finish it for you?' I said.

'No—yes—no! that is, you may if you like.'

'Than to waste one's time in attending to the requirements of a young lady who shall be nameless.'

'It *may* have been the least little bit like that,' Candida admitted, 'but, as I told you, I've forgotten. And so you have been studying, instead? "Among my books," you said. How is it I seem to recognise that phrase?'

I reminded her that a series of articles under that title had been appearing in a certain journal of note.

'Yes, of course,' she said, 'and you lent them to us. I think it would be very interesting,' she went on, after a pause, 'to have people one knows write an account of themselves "among their books." Why not Jack, for instance? I'm sure his ideas would be refreshingly original.'

Jack re-appeared at the moment. "They *are* redstarts,' he announced.

I explained to Jack what was required of him. He did not receive the proposal with enthusiasm.

'Hang it all, you know, Uncle Brian,' he said, 'it's holiday-time! Besides, I can't write a thing like that.'

I produced two half-crowns, and looked at them thoughtfully.

'The term,' I said, 'is near. I remember, when I was at school, one could always find a use for coins like these.'

'D'you mean—?'

'I mean, anything you write shan't go unrewarded. Even Balbus, let us hope, was paid for building his wall.'

My nephew's face betrayed an inward struggle. He was nearly giving in, but present enjoyment won the day.

'No,' he said, not without a tone of regret, 'thanks all the same, but it's holidays *now*. Bother the term.'

Then I fired my last shot.

'Jack,' I said, 'you always like to oblige a lady, don't you?'

'Rather,' he said, without any hesitation.

'Well, can you refuse Miss Ferrars?'

He regarded Candida with round eyes, and then he said slowly, 'No, I don't believe I can. But do you really want me to, Miss Ferrars?'

'I should so much like it,' said Candida, 'if you really can spare the time.'

'Oh, then, of course, I will,' said Jack cheerfully. Oh Jack! you are in very truth my nephew!

So Candida had her wish, and Jack had his half-crowns and her thanks; and upon my word I believe the boy cared about the latter most! And here is Jack 'among his books,' as conveyed in an epistle to Miss Candida Ferrars, and subsequently communicated, with his leave, by her to me.

'Dear Miss Ferrars,' Jack wrote, 'I felt regularly stumped when Uncle Brian asked me to do it, in holiday-time, too! And I wouldn't have done it for the money, either, I wouldn't really, only I wanted to please you. Not but what the half-crowns will be useful, too. So I said I would, as you know. But when I sat down to it I couldn't think of anything, so I had to go and ask Uncle Brian for help. Well, he said he'd dictate the beginning of it, just to give me a start, and here's what he made me take down:

'AMONG MY BOOKS.'

'Among my books! What memories those words evoke! What associations! Hours when we escape from the turmoil and conflict of the daily struggle, and hold converse with the master-minds—'

'"Hold hard, Uncle Brian," said I, "I bar that phrase!"

'"You needn't, Jack," he said, "it doesn't mean what you think. It's quite correct, I assure you. 'Hold converse with the master-minds.' Have you got that down?"

'"Ye-es," said I reluctantly, for I wasn't more than half convinced, you see.

'—of antiquity! Moments in which the trivial topics of to-day pale before the resonant records of the prodigious past.'

'"Isn't that rather tall?" said I.

'"Not a bit," said Uncle Brian. "And now I've given you a shove out into the stream, and I'll leave you to paddle your own canoe."

'Well—he went away. And there I sat, looking at what I'd written, ever so long. But I wasn't going to waste my morning, besides, between you and me, I didn't think so *very* much of his beginning. (I hope you won't mind my saying that, as he's a friend of yours). I'm not going to be beaten by *that*, said I to myself, so here goes. I was kind of desperate, but I set to, and it got

easier as I went on. And I've copied it out for you all fresh, because I spilt the ink over it just as I was finishing.

'To begin with, I don't know that I *am* so much "among my books," when I come to think of it. It's so much jollier to be out of doors, don't you think so? Still, I have to be in school so many hours a day, and I suppose I'm "among my books" then. Only, I don't believe I ever thought of them in that way before. No, and what's more, I don't now. Euclid isn't a book, nor Algebra. Take Euclid, now, pages and pages of arguing, to prove something or other about which nobody cares a button; at least, I know I don't. Why, sometimes even old Euclid himself has to admit that his conclusion (that's what Smithson calls it, he's my mathematical master) is absurd. Then why on earth should a chap waste his precious time to get at such a conclusion? That's what I said to Rackham minor the other day. "Why don't you ask Smithson?" Rackham said. "Because I don't choose," said I. "You daren't!" said Rackham. After that, of course, I had to ask Smithson. . . . Smithson's a beast. He has no sympathy at all, not a little bit. However, I gave young Rackham a jolly good hiding afterwards, that's one comfort.

'Then there's Algebra, too. *That* a book! Why, how can anyone get up any interest in x and y? *I* can't. I perfectly loathe them. I heard some sixth form chap the other day saying something about "the unnecessary zed." I don't know what he

meant, but I jolly well know *x* and *y* are unnecessary.

'There are other books we do in school, too. Some of them aren't so bad, considering they were written so long ago, "when education wasn't so widespread as to-day" (quotation from daily paper). There's Xenophon, for instance, but I don't think much of him. He advertises so. Keeps on telling you how many parasangs (that's Persian for mile) he marched before he had supper. It's like the way you hear people swaggering about how many miles they've been on their bikes since dinner time. I bet old Xenophon would have been a scorcher if he'd lived to-day. Still, I must own I like the bit where he and his men came in sight of the sea. It always reminds me of Henty—Henty at his best, you know. He varies such a lot—that's the weak point in Henty. Then there's Virgil, too. We were doing about the siege of Troy last term. I wouldn't own it to the the fellows, but I don't mind telling *you*, I think Virgil's ripping, though, of course, I should like him better if he didn't use so many hard words. Then there's Ovid; but I don't care much about him. He's always saying the same thing over and over again. and it's perfectly sickening the way he goes on whining about Tomi—that's the place he got banished to, somewhere in Siberia, I think. "Tomi-rot," young Rackham called it. He thinks he's funny, you know.

'Out of school I'm afraid I'm less "among my books" than ever. You see, there's so much else to do. Still, I read more in the winter time, and,

of course, I have my favourites, like other critics. I've pretty well passed through the Henty stage. Everyone has it, like they do measles. Henty's heroes are all such wonderful chaps, you get sick of them in time. They never make fools of themselves like people in real life do—young Rackham for instance. No, I've had about enough of Henty. But Conan Doyle is bad to beat, I read all his I can get hold of; and so is Rider Haggard, and one or two more. I'm not good at remembering names. I must tell you how sold I was my last birthday. Aunt Julia said she wanted to give me a book, and what would I like? So I said I'd like Conan Doyle's last. Well, Aunt Julia said something about wanting to give me a book to *keep*. "All right, Aunt Julia," I said, "you give me the 'Tragedy of the Corysoko' (I don't believe I've spelt that right, but I don't know what lingo it is) and I'll keep it safe enough." And when my birthday came what do you think I got? "Longfellow's Poems!" As if a chap like me had time to read poetry! However, you can *keep* a book without reading it, that's one comfort; and the binding's very handsome, and it looks well in my study. Even young Rackham can't deny that.

'There are other books, too, that aren't one's own, which as a general rule it's better to keep out of. For instance, last term I got in Mother Gayson's books. She keeps a sweet shop, and it's out of bounds, really. Well, I had no spare cash, and she came and told Smithson about it (he's my housemaster, you know), and there was a row, I can tell you. Didn't I get into Smithson's black

books, just? I don't want to have anything to do with other people's books again, I don't really.

'But one's own books are different. I think I understand now what Uncle Brian meant by "Master-minds." He must have meant Conan Doyle and Rider Haggard.

'There, Miss Ferrars! I hope it'll do. It's the best I can do, anyhow.

Your affectionate friend,

JACK HUTCHINSON.'

VII.

THE MISFORTUNE OF SPILSBY.

'And of all the places you saw, Mr. Spilsby, which impressed you most?' said Candida.

Spilsby had been for a little tour in Holland, and some of us had been trying to draw him about his experiences—with no great result, it must be confessed. He seemed to be suffering from depression—and that is very unusual with him. However, at this leading question he rose like a trout at a fly.

'Queenborough!' he answered, without a moment's hesitation.

'Queenborough!' we exclaimed in chorus.

'Yes, Queenborough!' he repeated. 'Oh, I daresay I could tell you things about those old Dutch towns, if I tried. But what's the good? You probably all of you know 'em better than I do, and I should only bore you. Besides, you can read all about them in the guide-books. Whereas about Queenborough I could perhaps tell you

something new and interesting, only of course you wouldn't care to hear it, because it's in England, and only a little bit of a place at that.'

He spoke in the injured tone of one who nurses a grievance.

'You wrong us,' I said soothingly, 'we should like to hear about Queenborough, very much indeed.'

'Indeed we should,' Candida averred.

'Really?' Spilsby said. 'Well, that being so, and seeing it would be a relief to me to talk about it, I will.

'I suppose ninety-nine people in a hundred, if you asked them about Queenborough, would tell you it had no other interest than as being the place where you ship for Flushing. I might have said so myself a month ago, but I think differently now.

'Not that I mean to say it's a place that knocks you out of time by its size, the beauty of it's buildings, the salubrity of its air—forgive me if I've caught the guide-book style—or its historical associations. I'm not aware that the wealthy and the great have flocked to Queenborough in their thousands, to bathe in its pellucid waters. The antiquarian has not burrowed in its dust heaps—at least I haven't heard of his doing so. The speculative builder has left the place severely alone —and I'm not surprised. The world, by means

of the London, Chatham and Dover Railway, passes it by with a careless glance. And yet for me it will always have associations. For I have done what few, if any, beyond its aborigines and those persons attracted to it by the minor branches of sea-faring commerce can boast—I have spent a night and a day at Queenborough.'

Here he paused. There was something almost tragic in his voice. Candida and I exchanged glances—the style was so unlike the usual style of Spilsby—and wondered what was coming next.

After a moment's thoughtful silence he proceeded.

'I am always an enthusiastic sailor — when ashore. As my train drew up at Flushing, I was exhilarated by the sight of the white horses out at sea and the salt taste of the air upon my lips. I made up my mind—not for the first time—to enjoy a tossing on the ocean. And, not for the first time, I was disappointed. I had the tossing, but not the enjoyment.

'The consequence was that when I landed at Queenborough I felt a complete wreck. I wasn't all there: I hadn't my wits about me—as one ought to have, when one's luggage is about to be examined in the interests of the Excise.

'In Amsterdam I had found a brand of cigars that pleased me, and I was bringing home "a broken box." That means, Miss Ferrars, a box

from which a few cigars have been taken. I was assured that such a box would be passed without any objection.

'My baggage consisted of a portmanteau and a Gladstone bag. I was under the impression that I had packed the cigars in the portmanteau.

'As I carried the Gladstone with me, I offered it for inspection. The portmanteau hadn't yet turned up.

'"Anything to declare?"

'"No!" said I. As I told you, I wasn't feeling on the spot. All I saw before me was my Gladstone, and I was sure there was nothing contraband in *that*. I forgot for the moment all about the portmanteau and what I supposed it to contain.

'Well, I unlocked the Gladstone at the official's request. He fumbled in it a moment, and then held up to my face—the box of cigars! My memory had tricked me. I hadn't packed them in the portmanteau, as I believed I had.

'In vain I protested that I had intended to declare them—that I had forgotten about them for the moment—that I thought I had packed them in my portmanteau—that I certainly should have declared them, when it appeared. All these statements—though absoluely true—were received with a scarcely veiled and cynical incredulity.

'"I can't help it," said Customs. "A fine of one pound in addition to the duty."

'His manner was deplorably snappy. It offended me.

'"And suppose I decline to pay?" I said.

'"You'll have to stay here and go before a magistrate," said he.

'Of course I didn't want to stay, but then I didn't want to give in, either.

'"If I pay the fine," said I, "what chance have I of recovering it, if I can prove my case in London?"

'"One in a hundred, I should say," he answered.

'That offended me more than ever. The train was about to start, so I had to make up my mind.

'"I'll stay, then," I said shortly.

'Off went the train. The platform was left in possession of Customs and me, a knot of his underlings, and one or two inquisitive porters.

'"Now," said I, "take me before a magistrate!"

'"I can't at this time of night," he snapped—he was obviously annoyed at my decision—"you must wait until the morning. The Mayor will sit then."

'"Then I must go to a hotel for the night," said I.

'"There's no hotel. Besides, I can't allow you to leave the station."

'I began to be annoyed—I'm not easily put out, you know.

'"Indeed!" said I. "We'll see about that.

Look here, my fine fellow: you're paid to do your duty, but not to be cheeky to travellers, whether they're smugglers or no!"

'Well, he climbed down a bit then, and eventually I was allowed to quit the station, leaving my portmanteau as a hostage. I was also informed that I should find "an inn" in the town.

'Such was the beginning of my night at Queenborough. After devious wanderings through ill-lighted lanes, I found the inn.

'I don't want to prejudice you against it, Gough. I think you are one of those people who like to buy their experience at first-hand. I'll only say this much—you'd pay dear for it. My room was over the bar, and the early watches of the night were enlivened by a discussion down below—the Eastern question, I daresay, judging from their excited tones. And when that was over, there were other causes that prevented sleep—I'll leave them to your imagination. I tossed about all night—it was worse than tossing on the sea. At daybreak I dressed and sallied forth, routed by the foe—a dismal, haggard object. You may have noticed that I don't look as fit as usual, even now. You have? I thought so.

'Hunger drove me in to breakfast—but you must be hungry indeed to appreciate breakfast at my inn. I was soon outside again, condemned to kill time until the Mayor's arrival. I killed it by thinking over what I should say.

'Half-way down the straggling main street of Queenborough a building that you might take for a Methodist Chapel obtrudes over the pavement a crooked porch supported by stucco pillars. It isn't a chapel, though. It's the seat of justice, and of the Mayor—the town-hall, in fact.

'Here, as the clock struck eleven, I presented myself. It was my first appearance in a court of justice as the person principally interested. Others, however, were interested in a secondary degree, for a crowd of the unemployed of Queenborough elbowed their way in after me.

'I bowed to the Mayor, the Mayor bowed to me, and the case began.

'First, Customs told his story. Then a subordinate corroborated it. Then the Mayor asked me if I had anything to say.

'Anything! I should rather think I had. It was the first time I ever had an audience that would listen to me. And that gives one confidence. I was suprised at my own eloquence. Don't be afraid, I'm not going to inflict it upon you. The facts, I allowed, were as Customs stated, but I submitted that the Mayor, after hearing me, would put a very different construction upon them. And then I explained, with complete satisfaction to myself—and carrying conviction, I do believe, to the unemployed—the seeming irregularity of my conduct. My error, I argued, was

merely technical. In equity I had not broken the laws of my country.

'I sat down, flushed with the foretaste of victory. Already, in anticipation, I beheld Customs routed. But would you believe it? all the Mayor said was this :—

'"It won't do. I say it won't do at all. Your explanation is all very fine, but it won't explain away facts."

'"Do you doubt my word?" I interposed.

'"Never mind about that," said he. "Facts are facts, and there's no getting over them. You admit the fact. That's quite enough. You young men are a bit too smart, and every now and then one of you get's caught, that's all."

'The old idiot! As if I wouldn't have taken some sort of pains to hide the stuff, if I'd meant to smuggle it.

'"A fine of thirty shillings," he said, "*and* the duty."

'"I can at least have the cigars?" said I.

'He looked slyly at Customs. "That would be unusual, I think?" he said.

'Customs almost winked. "Quite," he said. "They're for the Queen's pipe."

'"Then they'll never reach it," I said, "they've got to pass *you* first. Well, if you smoke them I hope they'll choke you, that's all," and with that I paid the fine and left the Court.

'I didn't linger in Queenborough, either. I took the next train to town. But I haven't felt comfortable since. D'you know, it's not a pleasant thing to be as good as told you're a liar, especially when you know it isn't true.

'Some fellow told me the other day there are no Customs in the Channel Islands. I think I shall go and live there. I don't care about having my word disputed. No, I won't stay longer now, thank you. I've got some work to do.'

And he left us, still obviously suffering from depression of spirits. And that is a very rare phenomenon with Spilsby.

VIII.

CANDIDA AS BELLONA.

'LE SABRE DE MON PÈRE.'

'If I were only a man!'

The words that I overheard on entering my aunt's drawing-room are in common use, I am told, where two or more of her sex are in conclave. As a rule they portend trouble to men. On this occasion Candida was the speaker.

'If I were only a man!'

'That your wish cannot be gratified,' I said, 'makes me feel that I have at least something to be thankful for.'

'It wasn't meant for your ears, you know.'

'I'm sorry, I had no wish to hear it. Far from thy servant's ears be the utterance of discontent!'

'Discontent may sometimes be noble,' my aunt remarked.

The words were ominous. I discerned a challenge. I scented an attack in force upon my sex. So I resolved to carry the war into the enemy's country.

'I saw quite a fine sight this morning,' I said carelessly.

'Oh! What was that?'

'I was in the village. And about half a mile away I saw something coming along the Norton road. The hedgerows are almost fully out now, so for some time I couldn't tell what was moving between them. There was a lot of it, and it carried things that flashed in the sun. I thought I'd wait a bit, and see. That was trifling, you'll say. Perhaps it was, but——'

'*Do* go on,' said Candida.

'Presently it turned the corner of the road into the village. It was a regiment of cavalry—hussars. Then its band struck up. All the women came to their doors, and the children were all eyes and ears. And what do you think I heard little Elsie, the lodge-keeper's daughter, say?—"Oh, if I were only a man!"'

'Is that all?' said my aunt with assumed indifference.

'Not quite. I am always glad to learn from anybody; so I said to Elsie, "If you were—what then?" "I'd be a soldier!" Elsie said. "The uniform is pretty," I conceded. "Isn't it?" said Elsie, in capitals. "And which would you join, Elsie," I said, "horse, foot, or artillery?" I knew she had seen all three. Now, will either of you guess her answer?'

'No,' replied two voices.

'"I'd be a hussar," Elsie said, "because theirs is the prettiest uniform of all."—I'll ask you for a little more tea, please, aunt. It has been a lovely day, hasn't it?'

'Elsie ought to know better,' said my aunt; 'and I hope you put it to her that it isn't the uniform that makes the soldier.'

'I didn't. I didn't think it would be any good.'

'Then I really can't see much in your story.'

'It didn't pretend to be one,' I said modestly. 'I only thought you'd like to hear about the regiment passing.'

'And Elsie's remarks —— ?'

'Merely added for picturesqueness. We can't dispense with all embroidery, can we? Bare fact is as dull as captain's biscuit.'

But my aunt wasn't satisfied.

'Candida,' she said, 'I've a vague feeling that we are being made fun of. Come to the rescue!'

Candida emerged from a fit of abstraction, and, looking at me thoughtfully, said—

'It so happened that I saw the regiment pass myself.'

'Yes?'

'And I was telling your aunt about it, when you came in.'

'Why not?' I said.

'And I was saying—that if I were a man, I would be a soldier!'

'I couldn't know that, could I?'

'No; you couldn't *know* it.'

'And now I do. Well the service has lost an ornament. You would be a hussar?'

'I hadn't thought of details. Why a hussar?'

'Oh, I don't know. Elsie chose that. The uniform is certainly pretty.'

'There, my dear,' said my aunt, 'I told you he was making fun of us women. Brian, it's shameful of you! such an unprovoked attack, too!'

'It was in self-defence,' I protested, 'and only in fun, too. You can't suppose I really think Miss Ferrars would turn soldier for the sake of a hussar's jacket?'

'*I* don't suppose you do, at any rate,' said Candida. 'Still, you meant what you said about Elsie as a parable—now didn't you?'

'Why—yes; I suppose I must plead guilty to that. But it was only in jest.'

'All the same there's a little truth in most jests, isn't there? And the fraction of it in yours has gone home. I see now—as I didn't see before—that the uniform, the music, in fact the gilt on the gingerbread, counted for something in my wish.'

'A generous concession,' I murmured.

'And I think it would with most people—don't you?'

'With every one—except a few fogies.'

'Thanks. *You* are generous now. But I don't want you to think that that was the only, or even the chief, consideration with me. You don't, do you?' she said, quite pleadingly.

'Indeed, no;' I said, 'the mere suggestion that I should think so makes me feel a wretch.'

'I had been reading in the paper about the outlook abroad. It seemed as if all Europe was against us. And then I thought, if war came—a great war—a war for our existence—how dreadful it would be not to be able to fight for England! And then I saw the hussars go by. And—yes, they did look splendid, I own. And then you know what I wished—and why. That's all my confession. And I don't want you to think I undervalue other careers. I don't. I am only speaking of what my own preference would be.'

'Perhaps I can sympathize with it more fully than you think,' I said. 'I should like to show you something that is in my study, if you will come.' And thither we went.

'That portrait above the mantel-piece,' said I, 'is my father's. And that sabre underneath it was in his hand when he fell.'

Candida looked at both almost with reverence.

'Yes,' said I, unfastening the sabre from the wall, and drawing it from its scabbard, 'here it is—"le sabre de mon père!" the sword I might have worn, had my stars been different, but do not wear.'

I fear I spoke with something like bitterness, for Candida said, very gently: 'You must do credit to it—and to him—in other ways. And I believe you will.'

But I was punished for my little parable. I met the poet a few days later.

'Poet,' I said, 'if war breaks out, shan't we feel ashamed—you and I—to sit at home at ease?'

The poet seemed surprised at my vehemence.

'I was a volunteer once,' he said. 'I suppose I could rejoin, if there were an invasion. What should you do?'

'I was thinking,' I said, 'whether it would be possible—whether, in fact, it's too late, or not, to apply for a commission in the Yeomanry?'

The poet stared at me a moment, pondered a little, and then said, 'the uniform is certainly a handsome one.'

'The uniform!' said I. 'How does that come in?'

'Ah! you can probably answer that question better than I can. I only thought it *might*, you know.'

IX.

THE POET'S STORY:

THE SISTERS.

'And so,' said Gusty Blake, 'he just thought no more about it, but packed up his traps and went on his journey all the same.'

Someone had started the subject of second sight, and Gusty Blake—she was paying us a flying visit—had been telling us of a cousin of hers, who dreamt on two successive nights that he was half killed in a railway accident.

'And what happened?' Candida enquired.

'Why, nothing,' said Gusty, 'except that he got to his journey's end safe and sound. I'm sure I'd never let a dream stop me, would you?'

'I'm not so sure. It might come true.'

'Well, I suppose it *might*. What should you say the odds were, Mr. Garth?'

The poet, thus appealed to, deprecated excess of confidence in matters so uncertain. This did not satisfy Gusty.

'But, Mr. Garth, you don't believe in such things, do you?'

'Don't you?'

'No; at least, I don't think I do.'

'Ah!' he said, 'that's just it. You don't think you do, but you wouldn't like to say you're sure you don't. And you are right, in my opinion. In the border country, between reason and un-reason, I think it's wiser to suspend one's judgment.'

'But have you ever known dreams come true?'

'I can't say I have, in my own case.'

'But you have in someone else's?' Gusty asked.

'Perhaps.'

'That means "Yes." Do tell us about it.'

'What would be the use? Your cousin's decision—'

'Now, *please*, Mr. Garth, don't tease. I do so want to hear.'

Well, it requires a hard heart to refuse Gusty Blake, when she puts on that pleading look and tone of hers—a harder one than the poet's, anyway.

'My story is about two sisters,' he began, 'whom I knew in the north of England, when I was a boy. I used to go and have tea with them. Their scones and honey were a treat; and, if my memory is not at fault, Hester Duncan used to say it was a treat to see me eat them. I wonder if the scones would taste as good to-day!

'Hester was my favourite. Her wavy hair was turning grey, but her eyes were bright, her step was active. Youth was loth to part from Hester.

I thought her the prettiest person I knew. Sixteen in man is prone to admire thirty-two in woman.

'Rachel, the elder sister, had the handsomer features, but years of ill-health had left their trace upon them. People said that before their trouble Rachel had been the handsomest and Hester the prettiest girl in all the country side. I used to wonder why neither of them had married, but that was before I heard their story.

'They were the daughters of a statesman—no, not a politician. A statesman in those parts means a man who lives on his own land and farms it himself—a yeoman, in fact. And when old Duncan died, the sisters continued to look after the land, and make a living out of it, too. Hester would ride into market herself, to sell the butter. She never wanted for customers, I heard. But then, the quality of the butter was undeniable!

'Still, two women—girls they were then—must need advice and help at times. And what more natural than that they should ask it of Alan Cleave, their kinsman, himself a farmer, who lived but a few miles away? Only the need for such advice did not seem to lessen as time went on. Alan was constantly at the farm, for one reason or another. People began to talk and speculate, as they will all the world over.

'I never saw Alan Cleave, but I have heard

about him from the dalesmen. He was reckoned a careless, wild young fellow, ready for any fun that was going, generous to a fault, and utterly devoid of fear. He had a passion for horseflesh, and loved nothing better than to ride his own mount, or, failing his own, someone else's, at Penton races. My informants all agreed that Alan had many friends, and that his worst enemy was himself. But, if careless of his own interests, he was shrewd enough when those of his cousins were concerned. As to his looks, I know that he was handsome, for Hester Duncan once shewed me his portrait.

'Such was the man who was the sisters' chosen friend and adviser. Rachel's nature was as calm and as deep as one of her own mountain tarns, Hester's flowed along sparkling and babbling, gay as the beck that murmured through their fields, yet, different as they were, they both trusted Alan. To the secret heart of each of them he was all that a man should be—brave, generous, and kind. Neither of them would hear a word against him.

'Alan knew it, he was not blinder than another. But year followed year, and nothing occurred to disturb the familiar relationship of the three. The gossips grew tired of speculating. After all, he was their kinsman, and we are very clannish in the north country. Such a close and protracted intimacy might not have stood the strain so long, but for the tie of blood. Alan supposed he would

marry and settle down quietly some day, but he was young yet. He supposed, too, that it would be one or other of the sisters; he could not imagine himself marrying anyone else. But it would have puzzled him to say which of them. Each was dear to him; each was so intimate a part of his life.

'The question vexed Alan at times. It was complicated, too. Both were always kind to him, always had a welcome for him. But did it go further with either of them? Alan shrunk from asking. Better to let things go on as they were. Then there could be no mistake, no heart-breaking.

'The discovery came upon him quite unexpectedly.

'The autumn meeting at Penton was drawing near. Alan believed he had a really good thing, a horse he had bred and trained himself. He thought that "Pretender" was good enough to win the steeplechase, and he meant to win it. "Pretender's" chances were often discussed when the cousins met. Hester in particular was bent on the horse's victory, for "Pretender" had been her favourite since he was foaled.

'It was the eve of the races. Hester looked up from her task of watering the flowers, as Alan trotted in at the gate.

'Alan hitched his horse to the door-post and flung himself down upon a bench. He looked put out, Hester noticed. She asked him if he was well.

'"Yes, well enough," he told her.

'"And you'll win to-morrow," she said gaily. "I'm sure you'll win! Oh, how proud we shall all be.

'Alan shifted uneasily.

'"Hester," he said, shortly, "I shan't ride "Pretender" to-morrow."

'Hester stared aghast. "Not ride "Pretender"?"

'"No. I'm not a coward, am I? You know I'm not. But I daren't ride him. Hester, I'm not given to dreaming, but I had a most frightful and vivid dream last night, and I can't get over the horror of it. I dreamt about the race. I saw the other horses and the jocks—most of them men I know—as clear as I see you now. The flag fell, we were off. "Pretender" went well. I could feel his great stride. We led from the first, there was nothing to touch him. He took his fences like a bird. There was only one more. Something startled him just as he took off. He jumped short, and there was a hideous crash. I seem to hear it now."

'Alan paused, and involuntarily put his hand before his eyes.

'"In my dream we lay in a heap, "Pretender" and I. Presently I heard voices, very far away they sounded. I felt myself lifted up, laid on something flat, and carried away. And then I distinctly heard a voice say, 'Nothing can save him, it's a question of hours,' and then I awoke."

'Hester listened in silence. At last she spoke.

'"And you won't ride "Pretender," just because of a dream?"

'He shook his head.

'Remember, she was but a girl, and a high-spirited one. She was set on "Pretender" winning. She had counted on Alan's triumph.

'"Oh, Alan!"

'He looked up. There were tears of vexation in her eyes.

'"Why, Hester?"

'She turned aside hastily and dried her eyes.

'"It isn't so much your not winning; it's what people will say about you. They'll say you were afraid, and oh, Alan! I couldn't bear that."

'She trembled with suppressed emotion. In a moment Alan understood the cause of it. In a moment, too, the riddle of his own heart was answered.

'"You couldn't bear that," he repeated, slowly. "Why not, Hester?"

'She felt she had betrayed herself, and tried to keep back her tears, but they fell thick and fast, in spite of her. There was more at stake now than the winning or losing of a race. Alan took her hand in his.

'"Hester," he said, "my little Hester, I'd sooner break my stupid neck than vex you, and d'you know why? Because I love you."

'He tried to see her face, but she looked away.

'"And I think I know why you couldn't bear to hear folks say I was afraid. Is it because you love me, Hester?"

'His arms were round her now. She looked at him at last, and Alan read his answer in her eyes. And so his difficulty was settled. And there was no more question of not riding "Pretender." Alan laughed at his foreboding, and wondered at his weakness in giving way to it. They decided to tell Rachel of their engagement after the races were over.

'But Hester must needs tell Rachel that evening of Alan's foolish fancy, and how she had laughed him out of it.

'Rachel turned pale.

'"He dreamt that!" she said, "Oh, Hester, something dreadful is going to happen. I, too, had a dream last night. I dreamt I stood beside someone dead. I could not tell who it was, for the face was covered. But I said, 'He is dead, and I can never be happy any more,' and saying that I woke."

'Hester laughed uneasily.

'"But, Rachel," she said, "you don't know it was about him you dreamt. How can you, if you didn't see the face? It's very silly to make so much of just a dream."

'But Rachel felt differently.

'"I can't get over the dread of it—and think of his dream, too, Hester. I'm going to write and beg him not to ride "Pretender" to-morrow."

'But Hester declared it would be useless. Alan's mind was made up. At last she coaxed Rachel into not writing, but Rachel felt she should not know a moment's peace until the race was run.

'I daresay you guess what happened. "Pretender" led all the way, and fell at the last jump, as his master had dreamt. Alan never spoke more. The sisters stood beside the dying man. And when the end came, Rachel turned and said to Hester, "You have killed him—you have killed the man I love," and then fell forward insensible upon his breast.

'Rachel's illness was long, and she bears the traces of it still. Hester never left her bedside, and has never left her since. They are elderly women now, but Hester is bright and cheerful still, for Rachel's sake.'

X.

OF STRATEGY AND DIPLOMACY.

'I HAVE had a letter from your nephew,' said Candida. 'You remember the article he wrote? Well, I thought it so good I advised him to send it to the editor of his school magazine, altering all the names, of course. And now he writes to tell me it was printed. But it seems the matter didn't stop there. Master Rackham detected the reference to himself under an assumed name, and I gather that there have been in consequence further hostilities between him and Jack. The odd thing is that I know Brosy Rackham quite well, and I've had a letter from him, too. Jack owned, it seems, that he wrote the article at my request, and Brosy writes to me to clear his character. I must show you the letters.'

'Dear Miss Ferrars,' Jack's began, 'just think, the editor took my article and it's been printed, and it really doesn't look half bad. I'm sending you the magazine, because the article is really yours, you know.

'Things are going on pretty much as usual, thanks. Smithson pretty cranky, but that's nothing new. We've been awfully excited about the war here, and I thought you might like to hear about it, because, as Rackham major said at the debate, "what the School thinks to-day, England may think to-morrow." We lower-fifth chaps aren't allowed at the debates usually, only they let us come this time, "because it was such a historic occasion," Rawson said. Rawson is president. I must say I thought that remark of Rackham major's a bit tall. One or two members said "hear, hear," but most of them laughed, and Rackham major looked rather a fool, but then he mostly does. I must say, though, Rackham minor took it well, tried to look indifferent, you know, as if major wasn't a relation of his at all.

'Well, we lower-fifth chaps didn't think so much of the debate—it was about the war, you know—so I won't bore you with a description of it, because we had a much better one in our dormitory afterwards, which I'm going to tell you about. You see, we weren't allowed to speak at the big debate, so we began to boil over in dormitory as soon as ever the lights were out.

'Private business took some time, because "a small but persistent minority" (quotation from Rackham major) wanted young Rackham to preside, and, of course, I couldn't allow that. It took a good deal of *persuasion* before this was settled. Pillows are awful good persuaders. It's so hard to make your voice carry through a pillow.

'Well, at last we got started, and as I was

president, of course I moved the motion, which was "that this house hopes the United States will give Spain a licking." I'm not going to tell you all I said. I don't remember it all, and besides I haven't got much spare time just now—I'll explain why presently—but the fellows on my side said it was jolly good. I know there was a lot about liberty, the inquisition, thumbscrews, the striped eagle of America, and heaps more. Of course, I don't mean to say I invented it all; having just been at the big debate some of the words they used there came in very handy. But when I ended with some lines out of Macaulay's "Armada," the house was all on my side, all except that minority I spoke of.

'You might think that all "British school boys" (can't think where I heard that) would be for liberty. But no—I'm quite ashamed to say it—there were two or three who stood up for Spain thick and thin. I need hardly say young Rackham was one of them. He wanted to know what business the Yankees had meddling in Cuba, which didn't belong to them. Said the Spaniards could give them ten yards in a hundred and lick their heads off. Said they were such gentlemen; look how Marshal Blanco let the "Saratoga" go from Havana, hours after the Yankees had begun bagging every Spanish ship they could lay hands on, before war was properly declared. Then he began to talk about what the Spaniards did in days of old, how they thrashed the Moors, but I said he was out of order then (same as I had heard Rawson say) because we weren't discussing that at all.

"But you talked about the Inquisition," Rackham said. "That's because I'm in the chair," I said, "and so I can say what I like."

'"You won't be there much longer," Rackham said.

'"Confine yourself to the question before the house," said I sternly (Rawson again). So he gassed on a bit more, and if we hadn't begun to sing "Rule Britannia" (not too loud, of course, lest Smithson should come up), and so drowned what he said, I don't know when he'd have stopped.

'Well, some other chaps spoke, and we got talking rather generally about quick-firing guns and torpedoes, and I just chucked a slipper across the room at the opposite bed, to show how a torpedo works, only I must have made rather a bad shot, for young Rackham sat up in *his* bed at the moment and happened to meet the heel of my slipper with his right eye.

'Thus "an individual encounter precipitated a general engagement," as our history book says, and in another minute the air was thick with slippers and pillows. And I'm jolly certain the American side would have won easy, only, unluckily, Smithson—we had forgotten all about him—heard the row and came upon us unawares.

'That's why I can't write any more at present, because I've got a thundering long impot to do before call-over to-morrow.

Your affectionate friend,

JACK HUTCHINSON.'

Rackham minor's epistle was brief, but to the point:—

'Dear Miss Ferrars,' he wrote, 'that chap Hutchinson has been writing about me in the school paper, and I want you to know it's *simply not true* what he says about giving me a hiding. We had a fair stand-up fight. I don't want to boast, but I can only tell you when Smithson saw Hutchinson next morning, he said he hardly knew him, he was so altered.

'It's like his cheek to keep on calling me "young." I'm only six months behind him any way.

Ever yours truly,

AMBROSE RACKHAM.

'P.S. Did you ever know such a name to give a chap? However, they call me "Brosy" at home, as you know, which isn't quite as bad, is it?

'P.S. 2. The joke about "Tomi" isn't half bad, whatever he says. I can say that, because my brother invented it, and he's in the sixth.

'P.S. 3. Major says he shall patent his jokes in future, and then they won't be abused. He doesn't know Hutchinson as I do.

B. R.'

A few day later it was my turn. Jack's familiar handwriting greeted me at breakfast.

'Dear Uncle Brian,' he wrote, 'I thought you might like to hear we are to have an *exeat* next month, Saturday to Monday, you know. It's such

an awful long way home, I couldn't go there for it. It must be jolly at your place just now. Rackham minor can't go home either, because he lives in Ireland. I had a regular row with him about that article, and one or two other things, but we've made it up now, in fact we're great pals. I'm sure you'd like him, he's just your sort. We should like to go somewhere together for the exeat. Do you think it could be arranged?

Your affectionate nephew,

JACK HUTCHINSON.'

When I showed Candida this letter, she declared Jack was a born diplomatist, and that it seemed to run in the family.

'You mean,' said I, 'that he manages to get what he wants by the exercise of tact and persuasion?'

'I suppose I do,' said she.

'Because, to say "born diplomatist" is as much as to say "successful diplomatist." A man who fails in that line forfeits any claim to the title. In the name of my family, I thank you.'

'Oh, but I'd sooner you didn't,' Candida said. 'A man may be a diplomatist and yet not always succeed, *I* think.'

'I adhere to my opinion,' said I, 'and therefore I augur hopefully for my own case. If you would but listen for five minutes——'

'Now, *please*,' said Candida, 'it's Jack's case

we are discussing, not yours.' I could but sigh resignedly.

'He is to come then?' I said.

'Yes, do ask him,' said Candida, 'if you want to please me, and ask Brosy Rackham as well.'

My invitation has been accepted with alacrity.

XI.

SPILSBY AS CRITIC:

THE TRIUMPH OF FEELING.

'I THOUGHT it the poorest scene of the lot,' Spilsby said.

We were sitting in the poet's study—Spilsby, the poet, and I. An incongruous trio: but life is woven of incongruities.

Spilsby was very full of a performance of *Julius Caesar* he had lately seen. I, too, had seen it. The poet, who had not, had asked for our impressions.

'Yes,' Spilsby went on, 'it's a grand play up to the last act. I was a bit rusty in the "book of the words," and when the conspirators came to call on Caesar—to escort him to the Senate House, you know—I thought they were going to kill him then. They might have, easily.'

'Perhaps they didn't quite like to, before Calpurnia,' I said.

'Very likely. I suppose they felt that would have been a bit too strong for "honourable men." Well, Caesar gets "carved," as Brutus puts it, and

then comes Brutus' speech to the crowd, and then Antony's. I tell you, Antony can talk—just about. I should think his speech was the best bit of stump-oratory on record. Of course he's a shocking humbug, but I think he was a bit fond of Caesar, all the same. Don't you?'

'You are quite right,' the poet said.

Spilsby looked gratified. 'And I think he shows Brutus up, too. I don't take much stock in Brutus, myself. He's such a cold-blooded chap. I'd sooner have Cassius, any day, with all his pepper.'

'But the scene that did not commend itself to you?'

'Oh—I'm coming to that. It's the one in the tent—Brutus' tent, and a very fine one, too. Brutus is there, growling away, as usual—at Cassius, this time. He calls him a deceitful jade, if I remember right. Then Cassius comes in, and in a jolly rage, too—not simmering, like Brutus. He goes for Brutus at once. That's what I like about Cassius. There's no beating about the bush with him. Brutus says, "All right, but clear the court first, if you're going to talk." It's done in a jiffy. "Now," says Brutus, "fire away!" and Cassius doesn't wait to be asked twice. He complains that Brutus has come down too hard on one of his officers for taking bribes, whereas at such a time you oughtn't to be too particular. Brutus

won't see that. He says Cassius has "an itching palm" himself. Then they go at it hammer and tongs. Please observe that Cassius doesn't attempt to deny the charge. He begins to bluster, instead: says he was a soldier when Brutus was in long clothes. Then Brutus gets wild, too, and there's a regular slanging-match. Brutus says, if Cassius is a better soldier, as he says he is (Cassius hadn't said so, by the way), let him prove it. This makes Cassius positively foam, but Brutus says he doesn't care a hang for him or his threats. "Besides," says he, "I wanted money to pay my men with, and I sent and asked you for some, and you refused me." Cassius denies this. I must own his argument seems to me rather thin. He just says the chap who brought his answer back to Brutus was a fool, and delivered a wrong one. That's all very well—but why wasn't the coin forthcoming? I don't believe Cassius gave it to the messenger, do you?'

'No; I'm pretty sure he didn't.'

'Well—Cassius himself seems to feel there's a bit of a discrepancy, so, in order to get out of a tight place, he begins to talk about his own infirmities, and says if Brutus was a real friend he'd bear with them a bit. He further remarks that he has a heart of gold, and offers it to Brutus instead of the cash. Brutus naturally says he hasn't any use for it. "You might make allow-

ance for my temper, at any rate," says Cassius. "It's inherited!"—I had no idea that excuse was so old, had you?'

'Few things are new,' said the poet.

'That's about it. I suppose it was too handy an excuse for those old beggars not to have found it out. They were pretty smart, I must own. Well, this last—I can't call it an argument, but anyhow it seems to weigh more with Brutus than anything else Cassius had said. "If it comes to that," said Brutus, "I was a bit snappish myself. So say no more about it!" And the row's all over.'

'Well,' said the poet, 'and why not?'

'Why not?' Spilsby was quite astonished. 'Why—just consider. Cassius was charged with two things—first, bribery; secondly, the refusal of money to a friend who needed it; and he doesn't clear himself of either—anyhow, not in such a way as would satisfy a court of justice in any country you like to name. What becomes of Brutus' virtuous indignation, I should like to know?'

I did not feel ready with an explanation, so I waited to see what the poet would say.

'I have always considered that scene,' said he, after a pause in which we both looked at him expectantly, 'the finest in *Julius Caesar*. And nothing that you have said shakes my opinion in the slightest degree.'

Spilsby looked surprised.

'I'll tell you why, if you care to hear. I admit that Cassius fails to clear himself of either charge. I imagine he knew himself to be guilty on both —certainly on the first—and made no serious attempt to refute them. Cassius, I take it, was a man more ambitious than scrupulous: Brutus was exactly the reverse. It was Brutus, you remember, who spared Antony's life. Cassius would have made short work of him. Cassius had sanctioned bribery—perhaps participated in it.'

'Then he might at least have disgorged some of the plunder,' Spilsby said.

'He might have—but for a further blemish in his character: meanness.'

'Well,' said Spilsby. 'Unscrupulous! and mean! Throw in the family temper, and you don't draw a very pleasant portrait.'

'No; he wasn't a pleasant man. I am inclined to think his character was redeemed by perhaps only two good traits—hatred of tyranny and love of Brutus.'

'What! love Brutus, and refuse him a few hundreds!'

'Remember—he was a mean man. Besides, it isn't fair to press that point. It isn't ever quite cleared up, after all.'

'Very well, then. He loved Brutus. But how did Brutus get over those two charges so quickly?'

'For a very simple reason. He loved Cassius.'

This seemed quite a new idea to Spilsby.

'The intention of the whole scene,' the poet went on, 'is to depict the triumph of feeling over reason. Brutus' reason remains unconvinced. It must. You can't suppose a man of his ability would be convinced by such excuses as Cassius has to offer. But his heart gives in, because he can't bear the sight of Cassius' misery—the misery of his *alter ego*, remember.'

But Spilsby wasn't beaten yet. 'I thought Brutus prided himself on being a Stoic,' he said.

'He did—but grief melts even the Stoic heart. I don't think he could have forgiven Cassius so easily, if his own heart hadn't been so sore. Will you pardon one quotation? You remember he says to Cassius—

> "Oh Cassius, I am sick of many griefs."

And Cassius answers—

> "Of your philosophy you make no use,
> If you give place to accidental evils."

And then comes Brutus' reply—

> "No man bears sorrow better. Portia is dead."

To me, the loss of Portia explains the triumph of feeling over reason in the mind of Brutus.'

'Perhaps you're right,' said Spilsby thoughtfully. 'I confess I didn't think of that before.'

XII.

EXEANT OMNES.

'HERE we are, Uncle Brian!'

So spoke Jack, as he emerged from the train. He was followed by a smallish boy with a large head, wide mouth, and observant grey eyes. Brosy Rackham stood revealed. He had the concentrated air of one who goes about his own concerns with a full appreciation of their importance. I was irresistibly reminded of my Irish terrier, Tony.

Introductions over, we were soon on our way home. I asked the boys for news.

'Rackham major's got a scholarship,' said Jack, 'and we had a half for it.'

Rackham *cadet* feigned indifference.

'Good for Rackham major,' I said. 'What else?'

'Tuck-shop prices have gone up,' said Jack. 'Some fellows say it's to pay off the debt on the pavilion.'

Brosy smiled with an air or superior knowledge. 'It's the war,' he said. 'Flour's risen, hasn't it?'

'Certainly,' I said.

'Oh, the war—I've had enough of the war,' said Jack.

'Any more debates?'

'No—not in our dormitory, that is,' said Brosy. 'Saturday nights we tell stories, turn about, instead. You should hear Jack's yarns,' he added.

'And suppose a fellow hasn't a story to tell?' I asked.

Brosy's form dilated.

'He's given a week to think of one. If he can't—

'Well, if he cant?'

'Oh, there's a row, that's all,' said Brosy, placidly. 'Are you fond of cricket, Mr. Gough?'

I said I was.

'Tell about the under fifteen against Morton's,' Brosy said.

'It was a tight thing,' said Jack. 'Morton's made 120. We got a hundred for nine. Rackham came in for the last wicket.'

'You were at the other end, you know,' said Brosy.

'So I was,' said Jack. 'Well, we put on nineteen runs between us. One to tie, two to win. Rackham had the bowling. He hit a catch to cover-point, and called me to run. I ran, for it was his call, though I knew there wasn't a run. Cover-point dropped it, but if he'd shied in straight

I must have been run out. Instead of that he got wild, threw in crooked, we got another for the overthrow, and won the match!'

'Risky work,' I said.

'Not so risky as you'd think,' said Brosy. 'I knew cover-point would get flurried, so I called to Jack to run, just to bluff him.'

'Just to what?'

'Bluff him,' Brosy repeated. 'Like the Yankees do, make him believe you don't think anything of him, you know.'

'D'you think that sort of thing pays in a general way?' I asked.

'Rather,' said Brosy. 'Makes you surer of yourself, too. Why, I should never say my Euclid if I stopped to think how hard it was. I just go at it without stopping to think, and then I get through all right.'

'So Euclid has lived to be bluffed! Well, well. And could you repeat the process half an hour later?'

'I shouldn't like to say,' said Brosy, 'but then I don't need to, you see. I just load up with him directly before I'm going to be heard, and then I fire it off and it's done with. I'm afraid I'm talking shop, though, Mr. Gough.'

'Not at all,' I said, 'you interest me greatly. Euclid and I are old friends'—a statement which reduced Brosy Rackham to thoughtful silence.

After luncheon we took the boys on the river. That was the form of amusement they chose, as they had no boating at school. Jack insisted on my Aunt Penelope coming, and Candida had got out of another engagement to bear the boys company. We had quite an idyllic afternoon. Jack's devotion to Miss Ferrars was perhaps a little marked, but Brosy, by virtue of a longer acquaintance, held his own in that quarter, as I think he would in most. We made tea in the approved fashion, and listened to the exploits of the lower-fifth, which our two young friends adorn. Then I must needs recite, but only on condition of a song in return from Brosy, who gave us 'Hearts of Oak' and the 'Death of Nelson' (he is intensely patriotic) in a thin treble. Then Candida sang 'Allan Water' in a way that brought tears to my aunt's eyes, and made Jack positively gulp—the boy is far too romantic, I must really talk to him about it. In fact we were all as happy as possible, and we might have been all of an age; or, as my aunt put it, 'Those boys made me feel fifteen again.'

It was dark by the time we got home to supper. And when that meal was over we sat out in the garden, watching the moon rise. Talk became desultory.

'Uncle Brian,' said Jack presently, 'did you have exeats when you were at school?'

'We did, indeed,' I said thoughtfully.

'And what used you to do in them?'

'Oh, much as you do, I suppose. Those who had friends near went to see them. Those who hadn't—' I paused.

'Well, what did they do?'

'Got into mischief, very likely.'

'Mr. Gough—you didn't *always* go to friends, did you?' It was Brosy who spoke.

I laughed. 'Generally I did. Still, there was one time, I remember, when I didn't.'

'Ah,' said Brosy, 'tell us about that exeat, please.' And the others joined in his request.

'Well, then,' I said, 'I will, as you seem to wish it. And as it's Saturday night, I shall be conforming to your school custom in spinning a yarn. It has the merit of being true—that's all I claim for it. If it's dull, don't blame me, but remember you brought it on yourselves. It was in my third year at school. I was about your age, Jack. It was the eve of the annual exeat, and I was in the lowest possible spirits. The friends in the neighbourhood, with whom I had stayed previously, had left. My own people were in India. Exeat! Let him go out. Yes, but supposing he has nowhere to go?

'Saturday came, and off they went, in all directions. The remnant of us stayed behind. I don't remember how we got through the day.

I have no recollection of anything very festive. Then came Sunday, and with it, to me, a resolution. I laid it before my chum.

'No one had invited us, true. But the authorities had pronounced the word "exeat." And we had already disobeyed them, I contended, by staying where we were the whole of Saturday. It was not too late to repair our mistake.

'My chum was easily persuaded. Together we concocted a plan. It was't altogether easy to carry out, but that made it all the more attractive.

'A clubbing together of our available funds realised a total sum of five and threepence.

'Two and threepence procured us a supply of provender. True, there were no shops open, as it was Sunday. But money can do most things. The remaining three shillings were set apart for a special purpose.

'Mind, I'm telling this story as a warning, as you'll see before I've done. I don't in the least defend or excuse our conduct.

'Our school was only a few miles from the coast and the small fishing village of Wrexby. It's a lonely coast, and Wrexby is a mere handful of cottages. Still, there were a few fishing-smacks there, and half a score of smaller craft. Boating on the sea was forbidden us—a fact of which the smacksmen were well aware.

'We started directly after dinner, and got to

Wrexby about three o'clock. The place was sleepier than usual, for the smacks were all away at the fishing. Beyond a few bare-legged urchins playing on the sand there was not a soul about. Stay, though, there was one, and the very one we wanted. Tom Allen was leaning against his father's rowing-boat, hands in pockets, gazing into vacancy.

'Tom was "not good for much," as they say in those parts—meaning, he was not quite all there: not sensible enough to be any help at the fishing, but quite harmless, poor fellow.

'Well, he stood out for a long time, but the three shillings triumphed at last, and we were masters of the *What Cheer* for the rest of the day. We hoisted the sail. There was a fair wind blowing, and we were soon bowling gaily over the sea in the direction of the Wayward Isles. We intended having supper there, and to get back before dark.

'Five miles north of Wrexby a rocky headland projects into the sea. Beyond it lies a narrow bay, some three miles wide, bounded on the north by another headland. Between the two the sea has scooped itself out this cup-shaped bay, which is thus invisible from other parts of the coast. And just in its centre lie the Wayward Isles.

'You wont find them in an ordinary map. Probably the name is only local. There are

half a dozen of them, two of which are hidden at high water. The rest of them are but barren rocks, with a few tussocks of coarse grass on their summits. Utterly uninviting, but the mere fact of their being islands gave them an attraction in our eyes.

'Well, we had a glorious sail. I never enjoyed a sail more. We got to our destination in due time, and ran the *What Cheer* ashore in the one creek of the largest island. Then we bathed, then we had supper, then we basked in the sun and talked—time passes quickly in such pleasant circumstances—till one of us noticed the great red disc was nearing the horizon. It was high time to be off. We ran down to the creek, but we had made no alowance for the turn of the tide. There was three feet of water in the creek. The *What Cheer* was gone. It had already vanished round one or other of the headlands. Wherever there are islands, look out for unexpected currents. We weren't aware of that then, but were to find it out later.

'We looked at one another in dismay. This wasn't exactly the exeat we had planned. In vain, while daylight lasted, we watched the shore for a stray passer-by. The road, owing to the nature of the coast, was some way inland. We didn't see a soul. Darkness came on. We were alone for the night, that was certain.

'Well, we made ourselves as comfortable as we could, and I fancy we slept well enough, for the night was warm. We awoke early, from the sun blazing in our eyes. It was five o'clock.

'After watching the shore for a couple of hours we began to realise that we were thirsty, hungry too, but thirsty first of all. And not a human figure broke the solitude.

'Three more hours passed. The coast was as deserted as ever. We shouted ourselves hoarse, but naturally got no answer. Twice a vessel passed us, and we tried waving our coats as a signal. But they stood too far out to see us.

'At last my chum exclaimed—

'"Look here, Gough, I can't stand this any more. We must get to shore."

'"All very well," said I, "but how?"

'"We must swim, it isn't more than a mile."

'That was true, and we were both fairly good swimmers.

'"But what are we to do," said I, "when we get ashore, without any clothes?"

'"I can't help that," said he, "I'm not going to stop here any longer. I'm simply dying of thirst. We must just sneak in to Allen's cottage, and get them to give us some clothes."

'It was a desperate venture, and I don't think either of us felt sure he could swim the distance, but what else was to be done?

'"We've never swum as far," said I, "but then we've never had to try. And we can rest ourselves by floating."

'Well, in five minutes we were in the water. And perhaps we might have got ashore, if distance had been the only difficulty. I don't know. But we hadn't counted on the current. At first we got along pretty well, but presently we discovered we were moving crabwise. The shore got no nearer, in fact it appeared to recede. We were being carried northwards, parallel with the northern headland—doubtless in the direction in which the *What Cheer* had preceded us.

'Then we decided to float a bit—partly for a rest, partly to see if we really were drifting. There was no doubt about it: we were.

'That was a terrible moment. I'm not going to dwell upon what we felt.

'"We must get back to the island," said my companion. "We can do that, anyhow."

'Somehow, it seemed much harder work now. Still we struggled on, despair nerving us.

'"Look!" It was my companion's voice. "There's a boat coming round the south headland!"

'There was. Onward it sped. The rowers were doing all they knew. Someone in the stern shouted to us, and waved a handkerchief. My chum raised a feeble cheer in return. We were sighted.

'And still we struggled on. But my limbs were growing heavy, there was a buzzing in my ears.

'"I can't keep up much longer," I gasped.

'"You must! See, they are getting nearer now, they have passed the islands."

'Dimly I saw the boat, and nerved myself for a last effort. Then I went under, and then, as I came to the surface, I heard a splash a few yards away. And I don't remember anything more until I came back to life in Allen's cottage with one of the sixth-form fellows leaning over me, and poor Tom whimpering in a corner.

'Afterwards I heard all that had happened. Poor Tom was overcome with terror when Sunday closed without our returning. Afraid to tell anyone, and in order to escape any enquiry as to the absence of the *What Cheer*, he left his home and passed the night wandering about the coast, with now and again an uneasy snatch of sleep. Morning shewed him that the boat had not returned. He determined to make a clean breast of it, and hastened to the school. He told the first person he met, who happened to be my rescuer. They hurried back to Wrexby, and set off for the Wayward Isles. Tom thought we had spoken of going there. We had, of course, been missed, and search had been begun, but nobody had thought of the islands. The boat came up with us just in time. The sixth-form fellow saw me sink—my

chum was going steadily—jumped overboard, and rescued me. But it was a near thing.'

The boys drew long breaths of relief. Then Jack spoke.

'Did you get into an awful row?' he said.

'I forget about that, it's so long ago. We deserved to, anyhow.'

'And the *What Cheer*?' Brosy asked.

'I regret to say that the *What Cheer* was only recovered after several days, and then a good deal the worse for wear, for a gale got up, and she was blown ashore on the rocks.'

'And the one who rescued you?' said Candida.

'One of the main hopes of my life,' said I, 'is that I may yet do him some little service in return.'

'You have not lost sight of him, then?'

'No, indeed. I see him constantly. You know him well. He lives only a mile from this, and his name is Basil Garth.'

'The poet!' Candida exclaimed. And then she added, after a pause, 'How like him to be so practical! It's just what I should have expected of him, he always does the right thing at the right moment.'

XIII.

MOODS AND TENSES:

CANDIDA AS GRAMMARIAN.

'Mr. Spilsby has behaved very nicely,' said Gusty Blake, in judicial tones. 'He built up the fire—while Mr. Gough talked. He induced the kettle to boil—while Mr. Gough went on talking —and now he shall be rewarded!'

The Blakes had installed themselves at the Priory, and we were celebrating the event by a picnic. The day was lovely, the spot well-chosen. Who could feel other than amiable? Positively I regarded even Spilsby with toleration.

'Bravo, Miss Blake,' said I. 'And what shall his guerdon be?'

'He shall take me out in the Canadian canoe!'

Spilsby accepted the proposal handsomely, and off they went. Upon my word, I don't think I've done Spilsby justice! Off they went—and I found myself strolling along the river bank with Candida.

'You are very quiet all of a sudden,' Candida

remarked. 'You had plenty to say while we were at tea.'

'Had I? Never mind. It's over now.' And here—to the best of my belief—I sighed.

'In fact, you are a person of moods. And you change from one to another without any warning!'

'Strange! That charge has usually been brought against your sex. "Variable as the shade," you know!'

'But I don't know! I think you're far more changeable than we are.'

'Yes?' said I. 'Perhaps it's as well;' and again—to the best of my belief—I sighed.

'Why is it as well?'

'Why not? You tell me I am a person of moods: shall I not have my tenses as well? As thus—imperfect, I was in high spirits: perfect, a gentle melancholy has stolen upon me, which I (present) rather enjoy than otherwise: but whether I shall continue to do so (future) depends upon—'

'Yourself!'

'Thank you: "yourself" was the very word.'

'No, no—"myself!"'

'"Yourself!"'

'"Myself!"'

'Do not let us quarrel over a pronoun. Which reminds me that "pronoun" has been used before now as a term of abuse. You have called me—by implication—a verb.'

'No, really?' said Candida. 'But you know, you *are* changeable!'

'Be it so. If I am to be a verb, let me be at least irregular. And, after all, though its moods and tenses vary, the verb remains the same.'

'Explain, please.'

'For verb, say personality. A person's self remains, doesn't it, whatever happens?"

'I suppose so.'

'And you wouldn't have that alter, would you? It's at the root of our trust or distrust of one another. Once put confidence in a person's real self, and you wont regard such mere externals as what he does or says. As the old sea-song runs,

"No matter what you do,
If your heart be true—"'

'And his heart *was* true—?'

'Exactly. And as to what some people might call vagaries in his conduct—why, they were merely his moods and tenses!'

'Well, I don't feel sure,' said Candida, doubtfully. 'I think for every-day use I should prefer a regular verb.'

'I much question whether you would. You would weary of it's monotony. Take the sea, now. You'd soon tire of it, if it were always calm. Why do you love it? Because its always changing—and yet it's always the same.'

'And you think people are like that?'

'I think the people one likes best are. Of course there are plenty who are always as monotonous as a dead calm. As persons, however great their virtues, I should not call them interesting.'

'Ah—and as verbs?'

'I should call them defective. Variety is to human beings what atmosphere is to landscape.'

'Can atmosphere redeem *all* landscapes?' Candida asked.

'Not quite all, perhaps, but most. Your friend Mr. Spilsby—'

'When did I call him so?'

'I will not press the title. Mr. Spilsby has hitherto suggested to me, in his general evenness—if I may say so without offence—a Dutch landscape overhung by heavy clouds.'

'Really, you are not flattering!'

'I never am—that is, seldom. I always thought you admired candour. To-day, however, the sun shone, and I realized that the landscape was not all blank monotony.'

'Tell me what you saw,' said Candida.

'I caught a glimpse of slow, straight streams dividing the level meadows: of splashes of yellow, that meant buttercups: of rustling green, that meant willows—pollarded, it is true: of patches of red, white, and dun, that meant kine at pasture:

prosaic details, if you will. Still they made the landscape live. Atmosphere had effected the change.'

'Did you see anything else?'

'I saw the slowly revolving sails of many windmills.'

'Well—and what do they typify?'

'The slow and dignified workings of a practical —a very practical intelligence.'

'And don't you think it's rather interesting to watch such workings?' Candida inquired.

'I don't want to obtrude my own tastes. Many people seem to think so.'

'Miss Blake, for instance?' said Candida.

'Well, yes, now you mention it. I hadn't noticed it before . . . It must be the force of contrast, I suppose.'

'*Is* there such a contrast?'

'Surely you must see it. Is there no contrast between a canal-boat and a skiff?'

'Yes,' said Candida, thoughtfully, 'the canal-boat is slow, and the skiff is—'

'Forgive me, it is hardly a question of speed, but of grace, lightness, versatility. In characters like Miss Blake's it is the unlooked-for that constitutes the charm?'

'I'm glad to learn that,' Candida said. 'I wondered what did.'

'To be brought in contact with so alert a mind,'

I went on, 'is to put one's own wits to the whetstone; it is to realise that we are bright spirits, after all, if our dull bodies didn't weigh us down. We become etherealized, we float upwards, light as gossamer—'

'"Lighter than vanity?"'

'Alas! yes. For vanity is more enduring than brass: but we, the higher we soar, the deeper is our fall!'

'Oh, there must be a fall then?'

'Inevitably: because we are not all spirit.'

'Oh, then you wouldn't care—yourself, I mean—to be *always* with—with any one like Miss Blake?'

'There are republics in South America that I would like to see, for their natural beauties: and I would like to see Vesuvius—but I wouldn't choose to live in one of those republics, nor on the slopes of Vesuvius. No, I would conjugate the verb of my life in a very different clime!'

'The verb again!' said Candida.

'In a clime that is to me the most genial of all—that is the only one where I can thrive—you know its latitude as well as I do. Present tense, "I love—"'

'Won't some other verb do as well?' said Candida.

'Perfect, "I have loved;" future, "I always shall—"'

'Stop,' said Candida, 'it is a defective verb!'

'I know it,' I said; 'it has no imperative mood. But it has a conditional mood, Candida; and if I only thought that some day, some day "you might—"'

'Hi! Hullo! Gough! Miss Blake has let the paddle slip overboard, and we're drifting hopelessly. Come out in the boat and rescue us, or we shall be down the weir, as sure as you're born!'

XIV.

FOR WANT OF AN UMBRELLA.

'It was a most pleasant picnic,' said Mrs. Blake, 'we all of us enjoyed it immensely. Such a lovely place you chose—and the afternoon was so fine.'

'There was only one thing missing,' I said.

'Dear me,' said Mrs. Blake, 'what was that?'

'An umbrella,' said I.

We were sitting on the lawn—Mr. and Mrs. Blake, my Aunt Penelope, the poet, and I: a sedate party, you observe.

'How can you be so foolish, Brian!' my aunt exclaimed. 'What could anyone have wanted with an umbrella?'

'There's a snake in the grass somewhere, Miss Gough, you may be sure,' the poet said. 'What's your drift, Brian?'

'That was the very word he used when he called out to me.'

'Who?'

'Spilsby. He said "We're drifting hopelessly—come out in the boat and rescue us."'

'Which you did most promptly,' Mrs. Blake said, 'and I am most grateful to you, Mr. Gough. I tremble to think what might have happened, if you and Miss Ferrars had not been by.'

'Please don't speak of it. It was certainly lucky I was there, but I only did what anyone else would have done. I found time to suggest another course first, though,' I added.

'Oh, what was that?'

'I shouted to Miss Blake to put up her umbrella. There was a breeze that would have brought them to the shore, with the umbrella as a sail. "But I left it at home!" said she. So then I jumped into the boat. But suppose I hadn't been there! an umbrella would have saved her a wetting, at any rate.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Blake, a little puzzled, 'you were there, so it didn't matter.'

'Not at all—to them,' I added, *sotto voce*.

Nobody heard my aside, except the poet—they weren't meant to, of course—for my aunt and Mr. Blake had started the game of running old acquaintances to earth, and every one knows how engrossing that is. Mr. Blake appealed to his wife at the moment to corroborate some fact or other.

'Let's take a turn round the garden,' the poet said to me. 'It mattered to you, then,' he said, when we had gone a few paces. 'You were interrupted?'

'A mere discussion of a point of English grammar. Still, it was of interest to us—at any rate, to me—and it's not easy to renew a discussion like that, when the thread of it is broken. I should think better of her if she'd brought her umbrella. I do like people to be considerate.'

'But, my dear fellow, who would have thought of bringing an umbrella, such a glorious afternoon as it was?'

'I can't help it,' I said, a little fretfully—for it *was* rather trying, now wasn't it?—'She might have known she'd lose the paddle. They always do.'

'Oh, come now—'

'Well, nine times out of ten. I detest accuracy. I'll tell you what annoys me about that umbrella. If it hadn't been for that umbrella, or the absence of it—'

'The discussion might have been finished,' the poet said. 'It was a pity, certainly.'

A moment later the path brought us abreast of the others, and we sat down again.

'Speaking of Ned Fairfax,' Mr. Blake was saying, 'he had no end of stories about the natives. He was magistrate at some place in India, and among his other duties he had to make a periodical inspection of the gaol. One day, in reply to his usual question, "Any complaints?" one of the prisoners began lamenting that he'd had no news of his family, and was anxious about his three

small children. "You can send a letter to your wife, if you wish," Ned told him. "The gaoler will write it for you." "She is, alas! dead," answered the man, "and my sister also." "This man," put in the gaoler, "is awaiting trial for the murder of his wife and sister." "So," said Ned, in telling the story, "we all shook our heads sorrowfully, and agreed that in the circumstances nothing further could be done." Poor Ned! there never was a better fellow. But he has his fads.'

You know the way people speak of someone who has acted in a manner they think they wouldn't have, and consequently come to grief. Regretfully, of course, but there's just a latent hint of self-satisfaction.

'Is he out there still?' my aunt inquired.

'Oh no—didn't you hear? Invalided home last year, and likely to be on the shelf for some time to come, I'm afraid.'

'Dear me!' My aunt looked troubled. 'How was that?'

'Well, as you know, Ned is a very strong, active fellow; and one of his fads was that an Englishman could stand anything a native can. Now, the natives are extraordinarily impervious to sun. They'll go about in the hottest part of the day, and moke nothing of it, when the average sensible Englishman knows he can't, and stays in his bungalow accordingly. However, Ned thought he

knew better than the average. He didn't make a point of going out because it was torrid, of course. But he never let the heat stop him, if he wanted to go anywhere. I suppose his sun-helmet saved him for a long time, but one very hot noon he went out with just an ordinary cap on, and as the result got sun-stroke.'

'Poor Ned!' My aunt seemed much concerned.

'Oh, he'll get over it in time, no doubt,' Mr. Blake said. 'But he's had to pay a heavy price for his imprudence.'

'Why ever didn't he carry an umbrella?' said my aunt, quite innocently.

'Why, indeed,' said I with emphasis, 'if she—I mean, if he had only had an umbrella—'

'Well, well,' said Mr. Blake, laughing, 'it's quite evident you both regard an umbrella as a panacea. I don't deny it has its uses—hullo! it's beginning to rain!' And sure enough the gravel was suddenly sprinkled with splashes the size of half-a-crown. We retreated indoors, and in another minute it was raining as if it had never rained before.

'And to think,' said Mrs. Blake, 'that I left my umbrella at home! I declare, Mr. Gough, I suspect you of having studied under one of those African rain-makers. Your moral is so aptly pointed. I'll never stir out again without my umbrella!'

'Perhaps it's wiser in our climate,' said I, 'but I know my aunt will be delighted to lend you one.'

After they were gone I asked the poet to come and have a smoke with me, for I was rather low. I can't remember that we talked much, indeed, I doubt if we talked at all. But we smoked in silent sympathy. Presently he got up to go, and as we shook hands, 'Brian,' said he, 'I'd take an early opportunity of renewing that discussion, if I were you. There are some subjects that bear repetition.'

'Yes,' I said, 'some. But I don't know that English grammar is one of them.'

XV.

MR. EDWARD FAIRFAX.

We have had a visitor — Mr. Edward Fairfax. He has given me some cause for thought.

It appears that he and my aunt are very old friends. In fact, they played together as children. They lived in adjoining villages in Lancashire. Later, when Mr. Fairfax came home for the holidays, about the first thing he did—would you believe it?—was to ride over on his pony to see my aunt. They went skating together, picnicing together, and all the rest of it. The recollection of these junketings appears to afford them both the keenest satisfaction.

Now—why have I never been told of all this before? Why, I never so much as heard the man's name, even, until old Blake began to talk about him the other day.

But one thing I notice. The reminiscences stop short at a certain date. It seems to be the period when Mr. Fairfax returned to India after his first furlough. And that must be—well, five-

and-twenty years ago, at least. Not a word is said of any visits, of any communications, even, since then.

I infer from this that twenty-five years ago 'something happened,' as novelists say.

As to his being here now, that's easily explained. 'Don't you think it would be kind,' my aunt said to me, 'to ask Mr. Fairfax down here? You heard Mr. Blake saying how ill he had been. I'm sure a little country air would do him more good than London.'

Of course I raised no objection: and here he is. He's a tall man, well-knit and spare. If it weren't for his iron-grey hair and his rather lined face you would never say he was over forty: but he is, by ten years or so. He's a bachelor—I won't say an old bachelor, because I think the term's invidious. I deny that a man's youth departs until he assumes the cares of matrimony.

I was 'Brian' to him almost from the first, 'because it seemed so much more natural.' Well, I don't know—it seemed to me rather queer. However, of course, I don't mind. Reminiscences have been so much in the air that I think I've caught the infection. Anyhow, I found myself humming a snatch of some childish song about

> An old nigger whose name was Uncle Ned,
> Who had no eyes for to see:
> Who had no wool on the top of his head,

and so on. Mr. Edward Fairfax has become, to me, Uncle Ned. Of course, I don't call him that to his face, you understand. I only think of him as Uncle Ned, because it's so much shorter and more convenient. *Is* that all, though? Or is it from some vague prevision? *Absit omen!* I can't afford to lose an aunt, even at the price of gaining an uncle.

He is an early riser. I thought I was; but he's always down before me. I always find him in the garden, smoking one of his everlasting cheroots. The first morning of his visit I was out watering some flowers before the sun was on them, when I became aware of the aroma of tobacco. At first I thought of Stumbles—Stumbles is the gardener—but it didn't smell like his tobacco.

'That's right, my boy!' I looked round, and there was Uncle Ned surveying my operations with approval. 'Nothing like a little gardening before breakfast. It gives a tone to the mind.'

'You are fond of it?' said I.

'Yes. I was my own head-gardener in India. But it's an ungrateful soil, Sind. I give you my word, I would rake the flower-beds overnight, and when I got up to look at them in the morning they were covered with stones as big as my fist.'

'Misdirected zeal of under-gardeners?' I suggested.

'Eh—? No. They just *grew*. A crop of them in one night. I had some goodish roses, too, and a certain number of hardy plants. But I'm bound to say the stones did best. I had to rake the borders every evening.'

Here the gong sounded, and my aunt came out to call us in to breakfast.

I wish I could convey to you an idea of the subtle change that has come over my aunt the past few days. But I can't even define it to myself: it's there, that's all I know. She's a handsome woman still, carries her years well, and doesn't look them. But there's something else about her now—an indescribable something that I never saw before.

'Why, Aunt Penelope,' I said, 'you've put the clock back!'

'I haven't touched it,' my aunt said. 'Do you mean the gong is too early? It isn't! Listen, the hall-clock is striking nine.'

'I don't mean that clock,' I said.

'That's right, Brian,' said Uncle Ned. 'I'm glad to see you're such a dutiful nephew.' And then he said something to my aunt about the red rose of Lancaster, and you should have seen how my aunt blushed! I felt quite embarrassed, and remembered that I had something particular to say to Stumbles.

Breakfast. More reminiscences. Much mysti-

fying talk about a certain yellow wagon. The wagon got lost, it appears—now, how could a wagon get lost, except in a quagmire?

'I wonder, Penelope,' said Uncle Ned, 'if you and I were to go back to the old place, whether we could find it again?' My aunt shook her head. This was too much for me.

'Surely, aunt,' I said, 'your memory is at fault! If you had said "mislaid"—but "lost!" How could anyone lose a thing of that size, let alone a yellow one? Why, it's colour alone would betray its whereabouts!'

'We did lose it, though,' my aunt said, 'and we never found it, either—did we, Edward'

'No, we never did.'

'Did you advertise for it?' I asked.

'No.'

'How unpractical!' said I pettishly. 'I give it up—unless it got lost in the Dee, along with Mary and the cattle.'

'I don't think it got so far as that,' said Uncle Ned; 'but I'll tell you all about that wagon some day, Brian.' And with that I had to rest contented.

I assure you, those two went on like a couple of children—talking all kinds of nonsense, to which I hadn't got the key. I was quite glad for any one to come to the house. I began to feel as if I had cherished a cuckoo in my nest. That's rather mixed, but you know what I mean.

One afternoon Candida called. I hadn't seen her since the picnic, except just once or twice for a few minutes. She and Uncle Ned took to one another amazingly. Candida wanted to know all about India, and Uncle Ned was more than willing to tell her. The result was my aunt and I were thrown *tête-à-tête*, and reduced to asking one another futile questions about my carnations and her embroidery. I could see she was put out: and I—well, you can guess how I felt. For the first time on record it was a relief to me when Candida said it was time for her to be going. You see, I couldn't do otherwise than offer to see her home.

When I got back, I think—mind, I only *think* —there had been a little breeze. But if so, it had blown over. My aunt was quite serene again. Uncle Ned said he was sure I'd had a delightful walk: which I had, in fact, no inclination, and no reason, to deny.

. . . . .

Uncle Ned has gone. But before going he promised to write me an account of the yellow wagon. He tells me it will be a prose idyl—it doesn't sound a promising subject for one, does it?—and that he was an occasional contributor to the *Jacobabad Times*.

But I'm a bit uneasy. My aunt doesn't seem herself; out of spirits, and that's most unusual

with her. She was quite cut up at Uncle Ned's going. She tried to hide it, of course, but she didn't deceive *me*. But what about Uncle Ned? can it be that, like his prototype,

He has no eyes for to see?

or is he feeling that sunstroke still? Anyhow, I'm not going to have my aunt's affections played with—no, not for all the yellow wagons in Lancashire.

XVI.

ON COMPROMISE.

'Mr. Gough!'

'Miss Blake?'

'I—I'm afraid you're vexed with me, Mr. Gough, about—about the other day, you know. I'm afraid we might have come upon the scene—we and the canoe, you know—at a more opportune moment.'

'Who can tell? I have not complained.'

'No, not in words.' And Gusty Blake began to dig holes in the ground with the point of her parasol. Stay, though, was it a parasol? I surveyed it carefully. It was brand-new.

'You have been shopping,' I remarked.

'You mean this?' Gusty held it up. 'How do you like it?'

'I own it puzzles me,' said I. 'As an umbrella I should say it would be rather scanty.'

'And as a parasol?'

'Well, a little solid.'

'Just so,' said Gusty, triumphantly. 'It's a compromise! It keeps off the rain—some of it,

you know—and the sun, too. You may look at it, if you like.'

I took it from her hand, and examined it. It was as dainty as shot-silk and ivory could make it.

'It's an ingenious idea,' said I.

'Yes,' said Gusty. 'You see, I thought it would please you if you saw me carrying an umbrella, only I do so hate doing that just for showers. It's so—so gampish. So I bought this. Don't you think that was rather nice of me?'

Never mind what I answered. In sheer absence of mind, I opened the compromise.

'It would make a capital sail, too,' said Gusty.

The Canadian canoe—our garden borders the river—was rocking gently on the ripples. Insensibly, we began to walk towards it.

'There's a nice breeze stirring,' said I.

'I do love being on the water,' Gusty said.

'Why, here we are at the canoe,' said I. 'Mind how you step in, Miss Blake.'

'Mr. Gough,' said Gusty presently, 'there's a lot of compromise in life, don't you think? Some people talk as if life were so simple and easy. Now, I don't find it so, do you?'

'Not always.'

'I don't mean so much in what you do, you know, as in what you are. One always knows what to do—at least, generally: I don't say one

always does it, mind, but it's difficult to know what to be—towards other people, for instance.'

'Don't you find your feelings a sufficient guide?' I asked.

'No, because there are other people's feelings, too. How are you to know if they're real, or only put on? if they're the kind that will last or not? Besides, one isn't sure how far one's own are going to last, either. How can I be certain that I shall feel as I do now to—to Stumbles, for instance, twenty years hence? I like him now, but I mightn't like him then. And he—well, it's just the same. He mightn't like me then, either!'

'Impossible!'

'Don't be silly, Mr. Gough. That's why I say there's such a lot of compromise in life.'

'Forgive me, I don't quite follow you.'

'Don't you? Why, it's plain enough. Take two people, now, who are inclined to think they like one another very much, you know. Well, they *may* take an irretrievable step, and *have* to like one another for the rest of their lives, or else be miserable. Or, again, they may not. They may say, "Let's just be friends. If we're just friends, and then fall out, why, it won't matter so much." And that's a compromise, don't you see? In fact, friendship is a compromise.'

'There's certainly a lot of friendship in life,' I remarked.

'That's just what I say,' Gusty said. 'A lot of compromise—a lot of friendship. It's the same thing.'

The wind whispered among the reeds, the birds called to one another. We floated on, for a while, in silence.

'Mr. Gough, I do like a man to be decided about things, to know his own mind: don't you?'

'It is perhaps as well,' I said cautiously, 'but isn't that likely to be fatal to compromise?'

'How do you mean?'

'I may not read your thoughts aright. But if a man takes "the irretrievable step"—well, some of his compromises must go, at any rate. *She* wouldn't care about them, you know. You couldn't expect it. And hers must go, too, for a similar reason. What a melancholy prospect!'

'Ah, but they needn't all go,' Gusty said. 'There are always exceptions. As for the rest, one would soon forget them. And, after all, one does get something in exchange, doesn't one?'

'Certainly,' said I. 'The only question is, whether one's feelings will last!'

'A man's ought to,' Gusty said. 'We agreed that a man ought to know his own mind.'

'And a woman's?'

'That's another matter; and that's what makes me think—sometimes—that compromise is safest.'

Another interval of silence. The soft plash of the paddle is conducive to meditation.

'Mr. Gough, did you ever think of being a land agent?'

'Never,' said I, emphatically. 'What a question!'

'Oh, because you seem to have thought of being most things.'

'An unlucky aptitude for seeing both the *pros* and *cons* in every career—'

'Yes, I know. But why not a land agent? It's not a bad thing to be, is it?'

'No—not for those who like it.'

'It's terribly overstocked though, isn't it?'

'Most things are.'

'Still, if a man is clever—not bookish, you know, like some people—'

'Thank you,' I interposed.

'You needn't—not bookish, but just practical and clear-headed, you know—he's bound to get on, isn't he?'

'I should say so. I think he ought to be tactful, too, so as not to put people's backs up, and to be good-hearted, and just.'

'Oh,' said Gusty, 'I *know* he's all that.'

'*He*!' I said. 'Who?'

'Who? Why, the ideal land agent, of course. Who else, pray?'

'Oh, I thought for the moment you might have meant—'

'Then don't think. And—of course this is rather sordid—but a man like that, would he make

much money? He might have none of his own, you see, or only very little.'

'I suppose it depends on whether he can get a big estate to look after,' I said.

'And that depends—'

'On himself.'

'Thank you,' said Gusty, and again she fell a-thinking.

Presently I saw two figures walking towards us along the towing-path.

'Who are these people?' Gusty said.

'The man,' said I, 'looks to me very like Mr. Spilsby.'

'And I think the girl is Candida Ferrars,' Gusty said. 'Indeed, I'm sure she is. Now, Mr. Gough, what do you make of that?'

'I think,' said I, 'it is a compromise.'

XVII.

THE YELLOW WAGON.

Uncle Ned has kept his promise. I know all about the Yellow Wagon now. Here is his 'prose idyl,' as he calls it.

THE YELLOW WAGON.

The other day I heard two men disputing. The question raised was, which felt their losses the more keenly, children or grown-up people? They got quite hot about it. As for me, when I was appealed to, I said I thought it was as open a question as ever I heard discussed. Then they went on arguing. And while they talked, I thought.

Childhood, said I to myself—and it's a good thing for the race—is seldom so introspective as to register its emotions. Children, excepting a few precocities, keep no written record of their joys and sorrows, and so in later years they find it difficult to compare the emotions of then and now. Take the case of losses—not the greatest,

of course: let those be sacred—but of the common everyday losses, those of money, for example, or of some cherished possession. Which feels the keener pang, the capitalist who learns that his bank has stopped payment, or the small child who has mislaid a favourite toy?

The capitalist, of course, you say. Well, I don't feel so sure. His trouble is more lasting, no doubt. But who is to say the child's grief isn't as poignant, while the loss is new? Not I, for one. When I think of that yellow wagon—.

I'll tell you about it, if you've the patience to listen.

Once upon a time, never mind how long ago, there were two children, living, as children will, in a serene atmosphere of their own, and from thence surveying with pity, or at best with tolerance, the external world of grown-up people, absorbed in its foolish grown-up pursuits. They had toys in plenty, for the elders whom they owned were good and generous. Why, then, was the tin soldier left to rust in idleness, spoiling for want of a drill? Why did the pasteboard heroes of that harrowing melodrama 'the Miller and his men'—no story from the Adelphi boards one half as moving—cease to tread the mimic stage? The children could have told you, had you possessed their confidence; but that was not given to everybody. In their playtime they wandered upstairs

and down, ransacking every hole and corner, likely and unlikely, where a lost treasure might be concealed. If questioned on their occupation, they probably replied, being self-dependent even in those early days, that it was nothing, that it didn't matter. At meal times and at lessons they kept their own counsel, and studied to behave themselves with propriety, for that was their way; but the sense of loss was ever present with each, and the first word that passed from one to the other, when they might be by themselves for play again, was of the vanished treasure.

Not to harrow your feelings further, I hereby admit you to the children's confidence. O yellow wagon, sought through many weary days, pursued in dreams by night, visible yet to recollection's eye, with yellow tilt poised neatly above twin wheels, image of many a country cart that jogged, and, for ought I know to the contrary, continues to jog along the remoter roads of Lancashire; undoutedly existent, for the children had handled you and laid you aside, as certainly departed now into the *Ewigkeit*; neglected, when you were new, after a morning's play; regretted with how much of keen sorrow, when you had disappeared, as 'things' mysteriously will, how very genuine was the pang which your loss cost those two preoccupied souls! For that loss neither trousered tin Zouave nor Miller-bandit

could atone. Hear now, ye children of all ages! Whence comes your large capacity for enjoyment, if not from your pursuing with real heartiness only one object at a time? And the hearts of these two children were set on gipsying. There was the papier-mâché donkey, ready for the shafts: there were the gipsy man, wife and baby—thus early does the family instinct assert itself in English children!—curiously home-compounded of rags and sawdust; even the lantern—a walnut shell, fitted with a scrap of *borrowed* candle—was there, for would not the good gipsies (sole class, the children thought, who lived the life one ought to lead) have need of it these dark nights? Only the wagon was wanting—the yellow wagon!

And they never found it! And how soon they got over their sense of loss: whether it was dissipated by the advent of a singularly attractive butterfly-top (a novelty then), or by the annual exodus to the seaside, so many seasons have elapsed that the children are unable to remember. But in the mind of one of them at least the years that have consigned so much to oblivion have left a vivid remembrance of the sense of loss, irreparable and unqualified, which pervaded his breast, when he and his playmate failed to find the yellow wagon.

Consider for a moment honest Dogberry's titles to respect. 'I am a wise fellow.' So! we doff our

caps to wisdom. 'And, which is more, an officer.' Let authority too have its due obeisance. 'And, which is more, a householder; and which is more, as pretty a piece of flesh as any is in Messina; and one that knows the law, go to, and a rich fellow enough, go to.' Good titles all! but there is more to come. 'And a fellow that hath had losses.' Losses! oh, egregious Dogberry! To wind up such a list with such an ending! What shall save you now from being written down an ass? Not the possession of 'two gowns and everything handsome about' you. Let us laugh our fill at your expense!—but soft! what whisper interrupts our mirth? It is the voice of the 'foolish watchman' of Messina. 'How now, my masters! So certain sure ye be not partners of my folly?' Laughter dies away, and I fall a-musing. And as I muse, another picture comes before my mind's eye. It is that of a small community—where did I read of it?—which consisted mainly of ruined speculators. And among those outcasts from fortune, those were most conscious of a merit not to be estranged, and enjoyed the most unquestioning respect of their neighbours, whose failures had been the most colossal. A scene that touches farce, perhaps, yet not wholly devoid of truth; for the man who has known losses does earn an added importance in his own eyes—though he may refuse to admit

it—and in those of his fellows, too. The loss must have been considerable, no doubt, if it is to bring with it this merciful compensation. And was not the loss of the yellow wagon considerable? Certainly it was, to the losers. And, because they were children, they found no compensation.

Oh we sapient grown-up people, so ready to deride poor Dogberry, so ready to decline upon his fallacy! The clear eyes of a child can steadily envisage his misfortune, can see his loss in its naked reality, isolated from all fictitious make-weights: while we, 'the roof and crown of things,' must needs bolster up our defeats with what ingenuity we may, and come at last to plume ourselves upon them. Which looks at truth more squarely, the child or the man?

But as none, it seems, can gaze on truth for ever without being blinded, childhood's good genius found a remedy. And its name is Forgetfulness. The yellow wagons of our childhood are soon forgotten; and if remembered in after years, remembered only with a smile.

XVIII.

SPILSBY'S STORY:

UNCLE THOMAS IN THE CHAIR.

'MISTRESS is out, sir,' said the butler, 'but Miss Blake is at home. Will you come in?'

I was in no particular hurry, so I said I would. And when I got into the drawing-room there was Gusty Blake, sure enough, but there was Spilsby, too. Now, how inconsiderate of the butler! I do so hate to be a third party.

However, there I was, and there I had to stay, for a time, at any rate. There was nothing for it but to put a good face upon the matter, and make believe that three's company.

'I assure you he's most intelligent,' Spilsby was saying. 'Knows as well as possible that he mayn't go out without his muzzle, and when he wants me to take him for a walk, he comes to me with the muzzle in his mouth.'

'What a dear thing!' said Gusty. 'Is your Tony as sharp as that, Mr. Gough?'

'He's pretty cute,' I said. 'You know we're

just on the border at our place—muzzle on one side, no muzzle on the other. Well, when I call Tony, he looks up at me as much as to say, "Norton or Marples?" If I say "Norton," he runs and gets his muzzle. If I say "Marples," he doesn't.'

'He's not old, is he?' Spilsby asked.

'No, only eighteen months—but why do you ask?'

'Because he never will be,' Spilsby said. 'He's too clever to live, that dog.'

'But, Mr. Spilsby,' Gusty said, 'not all the clever dogs and clever people die young. What a dull world it would be, if they did! Still, perhaps it's better not to be *too* clever—a kind of insurance, you know.'

'Perhaps you're right,' Spilsby said. 'In that case I'm heavily insured!'

'Now, really,' Gusty began.

'Oh, but I am,' said Spilsby complacently. 'I don't pretend to be clever. I'll tell you what, Miss Blake, I think these clever people often overreach themselves. Did you hear about Sam Dixon, the vicar's brother-in-law?'

'No,' said Gusty. 'Do tell us.'

'Well, he thinks himself no end of a smart chap, you know. People say he'll make his fortune some day, but I rather doubt it myself. He's not exactly doing so by his writings, I believe, but he's

got a turn for invention. He's always inventing things, and then finding out that some one else has invented them before. However, he hit upon something really new the other day, and, of course, it was "a felt want"—his inventions always are. It was to be called "the New Patent Automatic Park-Chair."'

'It sounds promising,' Gusty said.

'Yes. You see, Sam had often noticed how bored people were to be asked for pennies when they'd taken chairs, and perhaps were just in the middle of an interesting conversation. So he made up his mind to invent a chair that would abolish the custodian altogether. At first sight Sam's chair appeared to have no back to it, but on putting a penny in the slot, up flew a back, of about the same dimensions as the seat. Well, down you sit, all serene, with nobody to come bothering you for payment, and when you get up the removal of your weight releases the spring, and down comes the back again. See? Well, Sam was awfully pleased with his chair, and, of course, ordered one to be made after his description. It so happened that the evening it was sent home from the makers, he had gone out of town for a night, leaving word he would be back to lunch next day. Next morning, about twelve o'clock, his uncle called to see him, and hearing from the servant that Sam would soon be back, he

said he'd go into the sitting-room and wait for him. I must tell you Sam's uncle is pretty rich, and has had a way of speaking of Sam as his heir. Well, in he comes, and the first thing that catches his eye is this odd-looking chair, apparently with no back to it. Presently he spies the slot. "Another of Sam's inventions, I expect," he says to himself. "What a clever dog he is!" Then he fishes out a penny and drops it in. Up flies the back. "*Most* ingenious!" says Uncle Thomas, and down he sits. There was a newspaper handy, and he amuses himself with it for a while. Presently he gets tired of this, and thinks he'll go to the window, to look if he can see Sam coming. So up he gets. Click! Down snaps the back of the chair, and nips Uncle Thomas by—well, by some of his clothes!'

'What a situation!' Gusty said.

'You may say that. Uncle Thomas is a pompous old boy, who thinks a lot of his dignity. He wasn't going to ring and ask the servant to help him out of his difficulty, not he! So there he was, mixed up with that ridiculous chair—fuming and fretting, and getting hotter and angrier every minute. You see, the defect in Sam's invention was, he had forgotten people aren't in the habit of hopping off their chair as if it was a red-hot grid-iron. It was bound to catch the sitter, nine times out of ten. But Sam hadn't thought of that.

Half an hour later he came in. And when he saw what had happened, for the life of him he couldn't help bursting out laughing.

'"This is no laughing matter, as you will find out," thundered Uncle Thomas. "Release me, sir!"

'"Good heavens, uncle!" Sam said. "I'm awfully sorry—but why on earth didn't you drop another coin in the slot?"

'Well, of course, Uncle Thomas might have thought of that if he hadn't been in such a rage. But that only made him all the wilder.

'"I see what it is, sir," he said, "this is an infamous practical joke. If this is the way you treat me, you need never expect a penny from me —not a penny, sir!"

'And then that wretched Sam must needs go and make matters worse. "Well, sir," he said, "I can only tell you this much—if you don't fork out a penny now, I don't know how you're going to surrender occupation of my chair!"

'He couldn't resist the joke, you see. But it'll cost him dear, I'm afraid. And that's why Sam Dixon hasn't taken out a patent for his New Automatic Park-Chair. And that's what makes me say I think it's better not to be too clever.'

Amid the ripple of Gusty Blake's laughter I withdrew, leaving the field clear to Spilsby. I really think he had deserved it—don't you?

XIX.

A LITTLE MISUNDERSTANDING.

I was leaning on the garden gate the other morning, thinking out nothing in particular over a pipe, when I noticed a stranger pass down the lane. I should have thought no more of him, had he not retraced his steps a few minutes later, and looked at me as he passed, with what seemed an expression of interest. Now, interest kindles interest, and I took stock of the stranger's appearance. I noticed he wore a grey suit, rather looser than the ordinary, and a Panama hat with a wider brim than is usual in England, and that he carried a sun umbrella. He was a man of middle age with a clean-shaven face, aquiline features, and restless grey eyes.

I had just made up my mind that he was not an Englishman, and was on the point of forgetting him, when for the third time he came abreast of the garden gate. He coughed slightly. There was no ignoring the note of interrogation. It was an appeal I could not resist.

'A fine day,' I remarked.

'Sir,' said the stranger, raising his Panama, and mopping his brow with a silk handerchief, 'the fact is undeniable.'

I shall not attempt to reproduce his accent, suffice it to say I realised at once that I had to do with a citizen of the United States.

'It's hot, too,' I said. 'Won't you come in and rest?'

'Sir, you are too kind,' said the stranger. I proffered a seat in the shade. He promptly took it, and continued to ply the silk handkerchief.

'I'm not denying I feel the heat,' he said, 'but what's heat to a man who's on a pilgrimage?'

'What indeed?' said I. It seemed the appropriate thing to say.

'Sir,' he continued, 'England is the Mecca of good Americans. I have paid my tribute to the mighty dead; I have visited Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's, and Stratford-on-Avon. But shall I quit your great country without a glimpse of the mighty living? No, sir. In whatever solitudes they hide themselves, they shall not escape my homage.'

Something prompted me to ask him if he had been to Madame Tussaud's. I assured him that he would find there the presentments of many personages whose seclusion he would find it hard to penetrate.

'Sir,' he said, 'I have, but I was disappointed. I'm not saying the figgers ain't excellent. They are that. But I didn't find the one I wanted.'

I asked him if he had looked in the Chamber of Horrors, but my levity appeared to grieve him. He put it by, however, with a patient smile.

'I wasn't going to find him there,' he said, 'he ain't that kind. And I don't know that I expected to find him in the exhibition, anyways. You don't look for clams on top of the sand. I guess he's not that sort of man.'

He fell into a reverie. To encourage further confidences, I remarked that a preference for retirement was not uncommon. Whereupon he faced me, and said with rather startling abruptness, 'Sir, you are a citizen of a great republic!'

'Excuse me,' I said, 'I'm nothing of the kind. You cannot suppose—' but he interrupted me with a gesture of deprecation. 'You misunderstand me, sir, I spoke of the Republic of Letters, of which you are so bright an ornament!'

I bowed. I couldn't do less, could I? Whereupon the stranger produced from his pocket a rather dingy newspaper, with which he proceeded to emphasize his points, striking it now and again on the palm of his unoccupied hand.

'Sir,' he continued, 'I have here a copy of the *Gasville Gazette*. It is impossible that you are unacquainted with that journal?'

I was forced to plead ignorance. The stranger sighed.

'But Gasville, sir, you must have heard of Gasville—Gasville, in Tennessee?'

Truth did not permit me to say I had. He appeared to be struggling with a strong emotion.

'Well, after all, it would have been too great an honour for us. You have not heard of Gasville—be it so; but, sir, Gasville has heard of you!'

The information surprised me a good deal. I could only say I hoped Gasville was the happier for having the advantage of me. He averred, with solemnity, that it was.

'You see this journal, sir? It is the organ through which your utterances have reached Gasville, week by week, for the past twelve months or more. I see what you would say—you haven't contributed to it—no, sir. But it has an editor. Is it that editor's business to permit his readers to starve in the midst of plenty? Scarcely. Like the bee, he skims from flower to flower, gathering honey from all. And yours! Sir, the honey of Hybla—'

'Really,' I struck in, 'you make far too much of my small efforts. If the *Gasville Gazette* sees fit to cull a few flowers from English reviews, and I have been honoured by selection, I must needs be duly gratified. Though I assure you I never looked upon my casual contributions to a weekly

journal as flowers, or honey either. May I ask how you came to know the things were mine?'

'Sir, the initials B. G. are a household word in Gasville.'

'Ah! I forgot the initals. They have betrayed me. And may I further ask how you came to identify me as their owner?'

He smiled with an air of satisfaction. 'Sir, I do not deny it was difficult. But what are difficulties to an enthusiast? I found out the name of your post-town, no matter how. From thence, local information has guided me to your abode. Chance has done the rest. Permit me,' and he handed me a card inscribed with the legend 'Hiram N. Quirer, Real Estate Agent, Gasville.'

'Well, Mr. Quirer,' I said, 'it is really very kind of you to have looked me up. And now that you are here, I hope you'll give me your views on some of those questions which evidently interest us both. You have doubtless studied them in America, just as I have done in this country. A comparison of our observations may be profitable to us both. This is an age of social problems, now, isn't it? Take that of Capital and Labour alone! Why, it's inexhaustible. In a new country, or your part of it, at any rate, it's probably not as critical as here. Still, you have your difficulties, I make no doubt, and it would be of the utmost interest to me to learn how you face them!'

I was astride of my hobby-horse, and I don't know when I would have pulled up, if something in the countenance of Hiram N. Quirer had not thrown my steed upon its haunches. He was looking at me with an air of extreme wonderment.

'I wasn't aware,' he said, 'that you devoted your great mind to such topics. I suppose you turn to them as a relief from your exalted mission! But, sir, my visit must be brief. Let me carry away with me a remembrance of high converse on the most august of themes. I ask it as a favour.'

'Really, Mr. Quirer,' I said, 'I must ask you to be more explicit. I never supposed myself to possess an "exalted mission." I am only a humble worker in a vast field. And as to what you mean by "the most august of themes" I haven't the faintest idea.'

He smiled sadly. ''Twas ever thus. Thus do great minds dissemble. Thus they maintain their aloofness from the herd. But I will not be daunted. Sir, your mission and the most exalted theme are one. Sir, their name is Poesy!'

It was my turn to be surprised. I was about to deny the impeachment, but he forestalled me.

'Permit me to conclude. I was directed to your house. I marked your attitude of meditation. I recognised the poetic afflatus. I have talked with you. I am happy. Sir, your hand!' He took it.

'Mr. Quirer,' I said, 'I am happy to shake your

hand, but there is a mistake somewhere. You must let me put it right. Please tell me what articles of mine you have read in the *Gasville Gazette*?'

'Dissembler!' His smile was growing fatuous. 'I am a real estate-agent, it is true; but, sir, I have a soul, and for what do I go to the *Gazette*? For the discussion of the dreary problems of to-day? No, sir, I go to dip my beak into the fount of Hippocrene—the poems of B. G.!'

I couldn't help it. I burst out laughing, and laughed loud and long. Hiram N. Quirer surveyed me anxiously. I fear he thought me demented.

'Excuse me,' I said, 'would you mind telling me who you take me for?'

He gasped. 'For B. G. For Basil Garth.'

'I'm very sorry. I feared as much. I haven't the honour of bearing that name.'

His jaw dropped. He was speechless. At last he stammered, 'Then who the nation are you?'

'Does it matter?' I said. 'Still, if you wish to know, my name is Brian Gough, at your service. I am sorry to have misled you. It was quite unintentional. I inferred from what you said that certain articles of mine on social matters, signed with my initials, had been reprinted in the journal of your town. It's a little misunderstanding, that's all!'

'And the poet, Basil Garth?'

'He lives a mile from here, the first house on the left. But, forgive my saying it, he is not fond of making new acquaintances!'

'Sir,' said Mr. Quirer, 'my spirit is chastened, I admit. But I have not come all these hundred miles for nothing. I shall see him, you may bet your pile. You don't know Hiram N. Quirer.'

With that we parted. I don't suppose I shall ever see him again. But I am going over to the poet to see how he got on with his admirer from Gasville. And I really think I must give up signing my contributions to the press with those ambiguous initials, B. G.

XX.

A QUESTION OF AUTHORSHIP.

It all arose—as mistakes so often do—from doing something that had been forbidden.

One afternoon of early October, in an interval between storms of rain, we were making rather a rueful progress round the garden—Candida, the poet and I—in search of any vestiges of summer. A few roses still offered a desperate resistance to the weather.

'You might just as well gather those roses,' said the poet, 'while they're worth having. There's a lot more rain to come, and in a day or two they won't be fit to be seen.'

'I don't agree with you there,' said Candida. 'I think it would be a shame. Why shouldn't they be left to bloom as long as they can? We may have some sunny days yet, and then they'll be quite themselves again.'

I suppose it was out of perversity, for it certainly was not to please the poet, but I gathered them. I was determined Candida should have them. At first she refused them, pretending to be

annoyed because I disregarded her wish. However, I got my way at last.

I may have thought over the incident, as I sat alone that evening with a pen in my hand—a habit of mine when I'm not otherwise employed—and I may have been a little abstracted at breakfast next morning. My aunt said I was, at any rate. But an hour later I put the matter out of my mind, and thought no more about it.

About a week afterwards Candida came to see us. My aunt at once opened fire about the Clothing Club; but Candida's manner was *distrait*. I ventured to strike in.

'There's a time for all things,' I said, insinuatingly.

'Well?' said my aunt.

'It follows that some things are not for all times. I don't dispute the importance and interest of clothing clubs as topics of conversation—but, suppose Miss Ferrars has come on purpose to talk about something else?'

Candida thanked me, though she said nothing.

'The fact is,' she said, 'I have. There's something here I want to show you both,' and she produced a copy of the *Looker On* 'You know, Miss Gough, Mr. Gough *would* gather those roses, though I told him not to; and, if you'll believe me, the poet has gone and put it into rhyme, and I don't know whether to be pleased or offended.'

'And we are to help you decide?' said my aunt.

'We must hear the poem, then. And unless it's really good we won't forgive him.'

'No, indeed we won't,' said Candida. 'I don't feel sure if it's good or not. I haven't read it carefully, for I was quite taken aback by seeing what it was about. But now we'll all sit in judgment, all three of us. I mean to be tremendously critical; don't you, Mr. Gough?'

'I will emulate Aristarchus. The title, please.'

'"The Latest Roses."'

'That sounds familiar,' said my aunt.

'Borrowed,' said I: and Candida proceeded.

'As fickle as an April morn,
October with his driving rain
Now smote the garden paths forlorn,
Now broke in smiles again.'

'How do you like that?'

'"Garden paths" is rather prosaic, isn't it?' said my aunt.

'Distinctly pedestrian,' I said. 'Still, paths *are* meant to walk on, after all.'

'He needn't say so, though,' my aunt remarked.

'No,' said Candida, 'and "forlorn" doesn't sound quite the epithet for a path.'

'It has, however,' said I, 'the merit of rhyming with "morn." Please go on.'

'Crying, "We tarry all too late!"
Each other flower drooped her head:

But dauntless still they kept their state,
The roses, white and red.

'And, "We shall reign," they cried, "for long."
I gathered them for your delight.
"Nay, then, you did them cruel wrong,
The roses, red and white."'

'That "I gathered them" is a little abrupt, I think. Still, you did gather them abruptly—didn't you?'

'I admit it,' said I, 'and you answered very much as he puts it.'

'Not so prettily, I'm afraid,' said Candida, 'besides, he makes me say a great deal more. Listen to this:

'"For they had lingered many a day,
Defying still the sombre time,
Amid the withered leaves' decay
Recalling summer's prime."'

'Oh!' said my aunt, putting down her knitting, 'I don't think we can pass that. "Summers prime!" it makes one think of joints of mutton.'

'It's not quite so bad as that, Miss Gough,' laughed Candida. '"Prime" is a noun here, not an adjective. The prime of summer is what he means. Still, it's not much of a phrase; is it, Mr. Gough?'

'One would expect something better from *him*.'

'Quite so. And now comes your answer, that is if it's you, you know.

'Then I,—"How sorrowful their lot,
Who queened it at the garden's court,

To linger on when joy is not,
To be the mad wind's sport.

'"To feel their draggled petals fall,
Each after other, drenched and cold,
Till now the blast has dashed them all
Upon the chilly mould."'

Candida paused.

'That can't be all,' my aunt said. 'What does he want done with them? Would he have them treated like "the last rose of summer"?'

'Or made into pot-pourri?' I suggested.

Candida was clearly embarrassed.

'I can't read the rest,' she said, 'it's really too silly. I wouldn't have read the first part, if I'd known. As I told you, I didn't read it at all carefully before.'

'But we must hear the end, if we are to judge,' I said.

'Then you read it,' said Candida, handing me the paper. I obeyed, and read as follows:—

'"A royal sepulture they crave—
Refuse not thou a last request—
One hour to reign, in beauty brave,
Then die—upon thy breast."'

Silence fell upon us. My aunt was the first to break it. 'I've dropped a stitch—if not several. I think they're very silly—you chose the right word, Candida—and quite unworthy of the poet.'

'Perhaps they aren't his,' I suggested.

'Oh, but they must be,' said Candida. 'I'm sure it's a description—that about gathering the flowers, I mean—it can't be just fancy.'

'Still,' I said, 'this isn't the only garden—'

'Of course not, but it would be too strange a coincidence—'

'I don't think he ought to make you talk such stuff, Brian,' my aunt struck in.

'Poetic license,' I said, airily—but then I caught Candida looking at me with surprise.

'What I mean is,' I went on in some confusion, 'that I said—upon my word, I don't recollect now what I did say, that is, not exactly.'

'That doesn't seem to me to matter,' my aunt said, 'so long as you didn't say what he says you did.'

'Well,' said Candida, with some embarrassment, 'I shall talk to him about it seriously.'

'I don't think I would, really,' I said. 'Poets are so touchy.'

'Oh, but I will. He likes me to criticise his things.'

'But suppose that after all he didn't write it? There's neither name nor initials to it, you see; and he always puts one or the other.'

'That's true,' said Candida, thoughtfully, 'but he mayn't have done so this time, just to puzzle us.'

'I don't think he'd do that,' I said.

'No, but how else do you explain it? It *must* have been he who wrote it!'

'Why "must"?'

'Who else could have? Who else was there?'

'Only you and I,' I admitted.

'And I don't write poetry, nor do you.'

'All the same,' I said, 'you needn't accuse him of having written the thing, for I happen to know he didn't.'

'You happen to know—how, pray?'

'Because,' said I, in desperation, 'I wrote it myself. There! And now you may abuse it to your heart's content!'

'*You* wrote it!' said Candida.

My aunt's knitting fell to the floor. 'Brian,' she said, with conviction, 'you ought to be ashamed of yourself!'

But whether she meant I must blush for the verses (which were, indeed, my maiden effort in that line), or for my concealment of their authorship, I thought it wiser not to enquire.

XXI.

GOOD-BYE TO CANDIDA:

A PROBLEM SOLVED.

'It must certainly be settled to-day!'

That was the remark I addressed to myself, on waking, one day last week.

The curious thing is that I had made the same remark to the same person on many previous days, and that the matter still remained exactly where it was.

On this particular day, however, I spoke with conviction, for the very good reason that I knew it was my last chance of settling it—for a considerable time, at any rate.

Of course it never occurred to me that a morning I had set apart for my own particular use could be invaded by the concerns of other people. That never does occur to one, does it? That's why so many important affairs are settled at the last minute, I suppose. And, after all, perhaps what is known as the 'spur of the moment' is as

effectual a spur as any. Not that I want to defend procrastination. By no means. My object is to show how men and things combine to fight against the procrastinator. If he happens to come out victorious, it is through no merit of his own. Never procrastinate!

Take my case, now. See how 'my morning,' —mine, observe—went, and be warned.

I devoted the early hours of it to meditation and to a final revision of my ideas. So far, well.

Eleven o'clock was striking, as I picked up my hat and stick. I never even dreamt of the possibility of being hindered. I opened the front door—and there was Spilsby coming up the drive.

Various reasons have of late promoted a better understanding between Spilsby and me. He really isn't such a bad sort, so that when he told me he had come 'just for five minutes talk' I hadn't the heart, or the strength of mind—call it which you will—to tell him I couldn't spare the time. And then he had so much to say that the five minutes were more like fifty before he'd done. I might have cut him short, I suppose, but, after all, his telling me 'all about it'—that comprehensive phrase!—was in itself a compliment, and one doesn't like to repay a compliment with scant civility. Besides, I really was a good deal interested, only I couldn't help wishing he'd

chosen some other time. But I couldn't tell him that: and that's how the first part of what I had fondly termed 'my morning' went.

Well, he was gone at last—and again I set out. Nothing should stop me this time, I thought. But it was not to be. Other people's concerns must take precedence of mine. As I turned a sharp corner of the shubbery, who should confront me but my aunt Penelope and uncle Ned?

Uncle Ned has taken such a fancy to our neighbourhood that some weeks ago he came down and put up at the village inn, for a little hunting, he said. I invited him to transfer himself to our house, but he didn't seem to wish it, so I didn't press the matter. As for his reasons, I didn't trouble him or myself about them.

Flight, immediate and rapid, was my first impulse, but it was too late, they had seen me. Besides, there was a look about them both, a sort of self-consciousness, to which I couldn't be blind. It was evident that something had occurred. In a moment it flashed across me what that something was. When uncle Ned asked me if I could turn back with them, 'just for five minutes,' I obeyed with an astonishing docility. As we crossed the hall I was dimly conscious that the clock was striking twelve.

We went into the drawing-rom, and sat down. One or other of them—I can't remember which—

began to speak on some indifferent matter, but I waved it aside impatiently.

'You didn't bring me back to tell me that,' I said. 'I know perfectly well what you would say, so I'll say it for you! You've found it.'

'Found what?' asked uncle Ned.

'Why, the yellow wagon,' I said, with a touch of irritation, I fear: for I did feel a bit vexed with uncle Ned. Why couldn't he have stayed in India, with his howdahs and gymkhanas and all the rest of it? We were very peaceful here, before he came.

However, I couldn't be vexed for long. It was quite true, they had found it; and it seemed filled with such a load of happiness that in the end I felt quite glad they had. And of course there was a great deal for me to hear; how uncle Ned had made up his mind to give up India, and how he had seen a house not ten miles off that would be the very thing for them. And of course my aunt Penelope had a good deal to say too. And so we went on talking. And presently the clock struck one. I don't believe either of them heard it, but I did; and I realised that my morning—mine, indeed!—was gone.

I started up. 'You'll stay to lunch, Mr. Fairfax?' I said. 'My aunt will look after you. I'm sorry I can't stay myself, but I've important business to see to.'

'But, Brian,' my aunt exclaimed, 'lunch will be ready in five minutes. Can't your business wait till afterwards?'

'I'm afraid not,' I said. I wasn't going to be stopped this time. 'I may be too late, as it is,' and I made good my escape at length, driven, indeed, to the last minute. The train, I knew, started at two o'clock, so I would at least have a few minutes conversation at the station with some one who was to travel by it.

I had known the two o'clock to be unpunctual, and with any luck it might be so to-day. For Candida was going away for a rather indefinite period, and I wanted a talk with her before she went.

I was first at the station, a bit hot and flurried, but in time to receive her when she drove up. By the time I had taken her ticket and seen to the luggage it was one fifty-five, but the two o'clock was not signalled.

'The train is going to be late, I think,' said Candida.

'I hope so,' I said fervently.

'Yes?' said Candida, a little surprised at my vehemence.

'The fact is,' I said, 'I had such a heap of things I wanted to talk to you about, and nothing but interruptions all this morning. I was coming round to see you, and was prevented. I hardly know where to begin.'

'Try the beginning,' Candida said.

'Very well, I had a letter this morning—a letter from a publisher.'

'About the book? Please go on!'

'He won't have it.' Candida's face fell. 'He likes the style of it, but says it's too visionary. On the other hand he's read my papers in the *Looker On*, and he says, if I like to complete the series and make a book of them, he'll publish it. And he suggests "Problems of the Twentieth Century" as a suitable title.'

'Oh, how delightful!' I think she would have clapped her hands if the place had been less public. 'I *am* so glad! Now the interest of it will be real, and everyone will read it, and you will be famous, because everyone must take an interest in the twentieth century, you see, it's so near. And you were coming round to tell me that this morning?'

'Yes, that among other things, because you're going away.'

'Only you were interrupted. Well, now, by whom, or what?'

'Need we talk of them?' I said.

'Why not?' said Candida. 'It will fill up the time.'

'Well, then,' I said, 'that man Spilsby came round, and sat until I thought he'd never go.'

'That's an unusual honour for you, isn't it? Had he anything particular to say?'

'A good deal,' I said. 'He has got the agency to the Marples Estate.'

'And that barrack of a house with it, I suppose. How lonely he'll feel!'

'He doesn't propose to feel lonely,' I said. 'In point of fact he has already proposed—that's not your train signalled, surely. No, it's the down express.'

'Well,' said Candida, 'proposed what?'

'To Gusty Blake, and she has accepted him. Aren't you surprised?'

'Not in the least,' said Candida, calmly. 'I foresaw it long ago. And is that all?'

'No,' I said, 'it isn't. It's in the air, I think. You know old Fairfax is here again?'

'Of course,' said she. 'I don't call him old, though.'

'No? well, I suppose I musn't. I must be more respectful in the future.'

'Why?'

'Because—well, because he's going to be my uncle, you see!'

And this time Candida was genuinely surprised.

'After all,' I said, 'I don't know why one need be. They've been attached to one another all along. If circumstances have kept them apart hitherto, why shouldn't they spend the afternoon of their lives together, now there's nothing to prevent it? Surely it's very natural.'

'Yes,' said Candida gently, 'and I think it's very beautiful, too, such constancy. I wish I could have seen your aunt, but I must write to her. I seem to be going away at the wrong moment. And there's my train signalled!'

It was. The warning finger fell—like the finger of fate, I thought. There was yet time.

'Candida,' I began, 'you are going away, and it may be a year or more before I see you again. And what am I to do all that time, with the prospect of being left alone when the spring comes?'

'Alone!' Candida started. That result of my aunt's constancy had not occurred to her. 'Perhaps—perhaps I needn't be away a whole year. There's your book, too. That will keep you busy, won't it?'

'Ah! those Problems? Yes. But, Candida, they aren't the only ones. There's another problem, one that concerns you and me. Won't you face it, at last?' But Candida made no reply.

'You asked for time to think it over,' I went on desperately. 'Surely you've had time?'

A distant noise invaded the silence, growing louder and nearer. The train drew up abreast of us.

'Norton! Norton!' said a porter. 'Take your seats, please!'

I found a corner seat for Candida—still silent. Then at last she spoke.

'Those problems of yours,' she said, 'and your

solution of them—we can't know if it's the right one, can we, till the new century comes?'

'No,' I said, 'but what of that?'

'Won't you let it be the same with your—' but I made a gesture of deprecation.

'Well, then, with our problem, if you will? Can't it wait till the twentieth century?'

I shook my head. The guard blew his whistle.

'No? At least, then, can't it wait—can't you wait—till I come back?'

I looked at her steadily, and from her answering look I saw that it could.

'It shall await your pleasure,' I said, 'and so will I.' And then, as the wheels began to move, we said good-bye.

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